

An alternative path to Brevard's future

by Jim Reynolds

Is football really the answer for dwindling enrollment numbers?

The recent flurry of discussion about the possibility of football coming to our campus makes me wonder what other scenarios have been studied. Unconvinced that football is the golden touch panacea to our recruiting woes I am driven to propose another route to our goal of increased enrollment that I don't think has ever been considered by the Administration or the Board. This is probably not a golden touch panacea either and it may be that there is no such solution. We have a lot of very bright people on this campus who have thought about this issue. I suspect they have ideas that are as worthy of study as the football program is and I encourage them to put their visions forth in writing.

Rather than taking a gridiron route that would make Brevard more like just about every other American college, I would prefer to see the College embark on a path that will keep it somewhat unique while making a contribution to the world rather than to Division II or III athletics. I don't have any *visions de grandeur* that we will be attracting truly talented football players; I suspect that we will get those who other schools rejected because of limited athletic prowess or questionable intellectual aptitude. What I write below, at this point, is only a vision which, with research, may prove to be a fanciful poetic delusion. But in a world that is contracting daily, I think there is a vast market out there that we are not even considering. Given our continually declining enrollments, that is shameful.

When I came to Brevard, in the fall of 1999, there were more than 700 students on campus. The thing that really excited me about the College was the high number of international students. In my first GEOL 101 class I had students from the UK, Trinidad and Tobago, Bulgaria, and Sweden. I learned to greet these and other students in their native languages: for example, Georgian, Ibo, Swahili, Mandarin, and Japanese. Today, if I were to say, "Gamarjoba!", "Ole otu iti!", "Habari gani!", or "Zai chien!" I would only get blank stares. One graduating senior would still respond to "Konichi-wa!" but no one else would. Some of these students were outstanding athletes, although the futbol that some of them played was distinct from the foobaw that is associated with almost every other American college. Many of our few international students today are also outstanding athletes.

I, personally, am deeply saddened to see how few international students we currently have on campus. In 1999, they hailed from 26 countries; today, 9 countries are represented. I do not understand why we have let this happen. There are tens of millions of potential international students that would do almost anything to receive an education from an American institution of higher learning, particularly one located in a safe, non-intimidating environment. If we were to offer the equivalent of twenty full scholarships to candidates from around the world, we would get top quality athletes and scholars. Many well-to-do families in the developing world would probably look upon a partial scholarship of any amount as an incentive to send their son or daughter to the U.S. for their higher education.

Why don't we set a goal of trying to bring two to four students from every country on the planet? With approximately 140 countries, this could mean 250-500 students. Agreements with public or private recruiting organizations, such as the one we used to have in Japan, could help us ease back in to our forgotten international focus. What kind of campus culture would evolve under these conditions? The College would have a flavor and attraction like no other in the southeast. Middlebury College, in Vermont, has made its name because of its focus on internationalism. (The number of their applications goes up every year as a result.) To me, this would be a very attractive environment to send my children. I think a move toward internationalization would provide a long term growth prospect. I look at football as a quick patch attempt to make up for the failure of our current admission strategy's goal to achieve 1000 students by 2008. The football proposal projects an additional 100 students which would bring us from 525 to 625 students, still far short of the stated goal.

Internationalization is more in line with the College Mission Statement than adding a football program would be. If improving our athletics is a goal, internationalization could make us really good in soccer, tennis, golf, cycling, whitewater sports, swimming, track, basketball, baseball and any other sports that have strong international followings. One Brevard athlete participated in the Sydney Olympics. I guarantee no football player will ever do that! Football would bring us American football players and little more. It might be a suitable quick fix but I suspect we could do a lot more for the long term welfare of the college for the same price by considering internationalization. Let's get the biggest bang for our buck that we can.

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