

# Small colleges offer wealth of choices

By Scott D. Miller

After April 1, Delaware's high school seniors who have applied to the nation's most highly selective colleges — at least those not accepted during the early admission decision process — will begin haunting their mailboxes in quest of the sought-after "fat" envelopes, the mark of acceptance. Many others, of course, have already been accepted in the "rolling" admissions process used by Wesley College and others.

To those accepted at their first choice college or university, congratulations and best wishes. This column, however, is addressed to that second, perhaps larger group, the students who were denied or wait-listed at their first-choice college or university.

If you were accepted at your second, third or even your "safety net" college or university, your future is every bit as bright as those of your peers who received those "fat letters" from their schools of choice. Remember, college admissions committees relying primarily on high school grades, SATs and recommendations cannot fully measure your focus, motivation, perseverance, "people" and time management skills, all vital ingredients for your success in college and in later life. Take a look at some of our recent U.S. presidents. Ronald Reagan, hailed as "the Great Communicator," attended tiny Eureka College in Illinois. Lyndon Johnson went to Southwest Texas State Teachers College (now Southwest Texas State University). Some of our greatest chief executives, of course, never attended college at all: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman, to name a few.

In fact, if you were not accepted



## Guest Opinion

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to a large, "name" school, the odds are better than average that you will become a leader in your chosen profession or occupation. That is because small liberal arts colleges turn out a disproportionate number of national "movers and shakers." On Capitol Hill, for example, Nancy Pelosi, the House minority leader, graduated from Trinity College, a small, Catholic women's college in Washington, D.C. Down Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House, newly-appointed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice earned all of her degrees at relatively small private institutions, the University of Denver and Notre Dame College (Mass.) Although they enroll just over a fifth of all college students in the U.S., private universities graduate half of all senior corporate executives, 46 percent of U.S. representatives, 69 percent of Rhodes Scholars and two-thirds of college-educated United States presidents.

There is a good reason why small colleges turn out so many alumni who succeed in later life: as students, they seized the opportunity to hone their skills in a small, manageable and supportive environment.

In Delaware, we need look no further than Wesley's Rocky Myers

(Class of '05), a scholar-athlete who not only won the coveted Gagliardi Award, given to the nation's top football player in NCAA Division III, but who also graduated with a perfect 4.0 average in biology. A standout high school student, Rocky could have attended a larger, Division I university, but he chose to attend Wesley, where he could play and have a larger impact.

Small, lesser-known colleges often offer more opportunities to become involved in campus life. They afford students the opportunity to participate in athletics and student government, to serve on the newspaper and yearbook staffs and to develop the close faculty mentoring relationships crucial to success in later life. On average, the student-to-faculty ratio at four-year private colleges and universities is 11:1, compared with 15:1 or higher at public institutions. Alumni returning to Wesley, for example, regularly cite ongoing friendships with faculty mentors as positive impacts in their careers.

If you are the type of person who wants to become actively involved in your community, rather than to stand on the sidelines, a small to mid-sized university offers you the chance to do just that.

More than half of Wesley students volunteer actively in our campus community alliances, including the Wesley Boys and Girls Club, Wesley YMCA, Barratt's Chapel and Museum, Campus Community School and Schwartz Center for the Arts, to name a few. Nationwide, students enrolled at private colleges contributed an average of eight hours per week to community service, adding up to a whopping 400-plus hours per capita annually. And if political activism is your passion, you have also come to the right place: 76 percent of students at four-year private colleges and universities voted in the last presidential election, compared with less than 60 percent nationwide.

Of course, if you still have your heart set on attending your first-choice school, there is always hope for you beyond the baccalaureate degree. A large number of our undergraduates go on to the most prestigious advanced graduate and professional programs in the nation, including those at Ivy League institutions.

Regardless of where you are off to next fall, I offer you the same guidance I give to our first-year students at Wesley during their orientation sessions: get involved, try new subjects and activities, take advantage of all that college offers and, above all, do not let occasional adversities deter you from achieving your goals. The possibilities are limited only by your time, imagination, and perseverance.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Scott D. Miller is president of Wesley College in Dover. Statistics are from the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) in Washington, D.C., of which he is a member.*