Small Axe, Big Grant

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Welcome to mud season — if not where you are, then certainly on campus! There are many remarkable things we all love about Bates, but the long, long month of March and the ensuing mud season aren’t necessarily at the top of that list. We’d like to share with you, however, some of the remarkable things that continue to make our work in the Parents & Family Association rewarding.

Did you know —
• The Class of 2007 had 4,089 applicants, of which only 30.7 percent were accepted. Of those, an outstanding 38.8 percent chose Bates.
• Bates’ student-faculty ratio is 10-to-1.
• 70 percent of Bates students benefit from study-abroad programs.
• The comprehensive fee this year was $37,500 — but it costs the College approximately $50,000 per student each year to provide a Bates education.
• 46.7 percent of Bates students in 2002-03 received financial aid.
• In 2003-04, $14.4 million was awarded in scholarship aid, of which only $3 million was in designated scholarship funds. The remaining aid came from the Bates annual budget.
• Bates was recently ranked ninth in the nation of all colleges and universities in overall academic experience, but 88th in faculty salaries.

It’s up to each and every one of us to help meet the challenge of closing the gap in faculty salaries, and to reach the Parents Fund goals of $625,000 and total parent participation.

These pieces of good news and “challenging” news make Bates the exceptional place that it is. We hope you’ll enjoy participating in all aspects of the Parents & Family Association — from reading the good news in this newsletter, to meeting fellow parents at Bates events, to supporting the Parents Fund so we can help meet some of the challenges listed above.

Cards are key to improved security

Cards are trumping keys for unlocking doors at Bates, as an electronic access system featuring “proximity” identity cards is phased in this spring. The high-tech system is part of a campus-wide security upgrade costing around $3 million.

Replacing key access, the cards — called proximity cards because they are held near a sensor to operate — will give students, faculty and staff flexible access to 60 buildings at Bates.

Outside normal business hours, the system will “recognize” and admit people who have business in a given building at a given time. It will associate faculty with their classroom and office buildings, and students with their residences, as well as with academic spaces they have approval to enter — for instance, a laboratory for the sake of monitoring a long experiment.

Placed near the lock sensor, the card unlocks the door and shows a green light for five seconds. If the door is still open after 20 seconds, the sensor beeps a warning that soon becomes a 95-decibel alarm. This automatically notifies Security, which dispatches an officer — and sets in motion a possible fine.

“We don’t want any money. What we want is compliance,” says Thomas Carey ’73, director of Security and Campus Safety. “If residents close a door before an officer arrives, there will be no fine. But we cannot have doorways propped open.”

During a typical month, Security staffers find more than 100 propped doors. Dealing with those, and with students locked out of their residences, costs the Security staff time that would be better spent patrolling campus.

“Our goal is to improve security while maintaining the sense of openness that’s been prized at Bates,” says Gene Wiemers, associate vice president for academic affairs and chair of the College’s Security and Access Group. “Electronic access should enhance that sense of openness by allowing people to move freely among buildings where they need to be, without leaving doors open to anyone who happens by.”

Improved campus lighting and other infrastructure changes are also included in the campus security upgrade — which has been accomplished under budget and with no net gains in staff, Wiemers adds.

Bates College first-year students Adam Dengler of Horseheads, N.Y., left, and Teah Muller of Guilford, Conn., right, plunge into the college’s Lake Andrews as part of the bone-chilling annual tradition called the “Puddle Jump.” Described as “exuberance at the end of a hard winter” by one of its founders, the 30-year-old tradition features members of the Bates Outing Club cutting a hole in the ice for dippers to make the descent.
Campus Master Plan, Phase I

How shall we dine at Bates? President Elaine Tuttle Hansen posed that question at a campus meeting in February, pointing out that it’s been years since Commons could accommodate the entire student body in one sitting — and reminding listeners of Virginia Woolf’s famous assertion that dining well is the prerequisite to thinking well, among other activities.

The answer to her question, it’s hoped, will be one of many to emerge from a process that was the meeting’s topic: the campus master plan for Bates being conducted by Sasaki Associates, an architecture, design and planning firm.

At the meeting in a packed Chase Hall Lounge, Hansen and Terry Beckmann, vice president for finance and administration, summed up the findings from the first, fact-finding phase of the Sasaki process. It was a review that covered a lot of ground, literally — 109 acres and some 85 buildings.

Phase I was rich in reassurance, Hansen indicated: In terms of its core aesthetic, its buildable land and the number of students, Bates is in solid shape. Most important, Hansen said, “we now know better what our priorities are.”

A finding of particular interest involved the wood-frame houses that currently sleep about 500 students. The bad news is that most of those buildings need significant renovation; the good news is that it would cost roughly the same to renovate them on the one hand or rebuild from scratch on the other.

“It will cost a lot of money, but this is actually a good outcome,” Beckmann said, because it means concept — how can Bates residences be designed for the best possible student experience? — rather than cost will guide the renovations.

Indeed, said Hansen, as Bates develops options for dealing with the campus infrastructure, thinking outside the box is Job One: “We need buildings that meet our needs in creative and unexpected ways.”

“We pretty much cleaned house in hardware,” said debate coach Bryan Brito, referring to the team’s multiple trophies earned by varsity and novice team debaters.

Earlier this year, Creighton and Neville-O’Neill led Bates in sweeping the 2003 APDA’s Novice Championships at Columbia University. Creighton began policy debate during his senior year in high school, while Neville-O’Neill had never previously done any public speaking. “They succeeded against enormous competition,” said Brito.

“Ryan and I are more than the sum of our parts as debaters,” Neville-O’Neill says. “Our arguments complement each other, a rare dynamic that has made our success possible.”

Bates novice debate partners Ryan Creighton ’07 of Lyme, N.H., and Mike Neville-O’Neill ’07 of Rowley, Mass., are headed for the 2004 American Parliamentary Debate Association’s National Championship Tournament at Swarthmore College. They secured their spot — one of three for Bates — after placing second overall in a Bowdoin College parliamentary debate tournament, where Bates won many of the top rankings.
All-American swimmer sets Olympic course

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After bringing her fourth and fifth All-America awards home from the 2004 NCAA Division III Women’s Swimming and Diving Championships, Vanessa Williamson ’05 of Auburn, Maine, is already eyeing loftier goals.

Williamson finished second in the 200-yard butterfly and third in the 100 fly, marking the second consecutive season she has finished in the top five in each event. Her performance, however, fell short of her expectations.

“It’s hard coming into a meet seeded first [in the 200 fly] and second [in the 100 fly] and not getting first and second,” says Williamson. “It’s definitely going to make me work a lot harder.”

In April, she will compete at the Counsilman Classic Grand Prix Meet in Indianapolis, Ind. She is entered in the 100- and 200-meter butterfly events and will attempt to qualify for the U.S. Olympic trials, to be held in Long Beach, Calif., in July.

With several world-class swimmers on hand, including Michael Phelps and eight-time Olympic gold medalist Jenny Thompson, the meet will be a new experience for Williamson, who has been a favorite in nearly every race in her collegiate career.

“I can’t let it get to my head,” says Williamson. “I have to race my own race, whether I’m seeded first or 21st.”

She doesn’t have to look far for motivation. Senior Liz Wanless of Belleville, Ill., won the NCAA Division III women’s shot put title earlier this year with an Olympic trial qualifying distance.

“It seems weird that Bates could have two Olympians,” says Williamson. “But our coaches can give us so much individual attention. When I found out Liz had hit the Olympic trial cut, it just made me want it even more.”