

Southwestern is becoming a national college

A special report to the students, faculty, alumni and friends of Southwestern At Memphis

National excellence. The goal is the same as it was in 1925 when Southwestern opened its doors in Memphis.

"It is our ideal to attempt nothing that we cannot do as well as it can be done in this country," said Dr. Charles E. Diehl, the minister-turned-college-president who spearheaded Southwestern's move from rural Clarksville, Tenn., to Memphis. Out of stone, slate and high scholarly standards, he established an institution that, in his words, would "endure for centuries . . . and command the respect and quicken the pride of succeeding generations."

In the 58 years since, Southwestern has indeed become a highly-regarded liberal arts college, noted particularly for its impressive interdisciplinary programs, its Oxford-styled tutorials, its rigorous preparation for graduate schools and careers, and the Gothic beauty of its campus. Among those who know it — graduate schools, employers, alumni, high school counselors and parents — it is considered one of the best small private colleges in the South. Beyond those circles of familiarity, however, Southwestern's well-documented academic strengths remain hidden.

But that must change, say college trustees and administrators.

Gathered in Point Clear, Ala., at its first off-campus meeting in half a century, Southwestern's board of trustees voted in late February that the college should set its sights on national academic prominence, rather than regional standing only. It was a decision signaling a new era for the college and a multitude of challenges. Board Chairman Frank Mitchener called it one of the three most important meetings in the college's history.

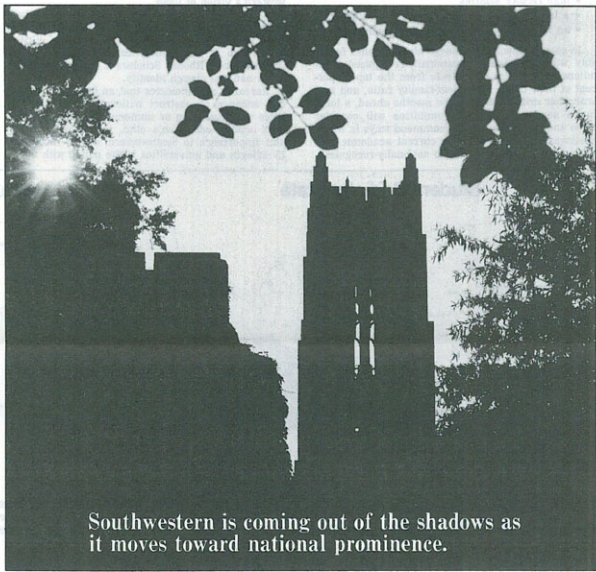
The reasons for that decision point, in part to demographics, say college officials. During the next decade, the number of 18-year-olds is expected to drop 26%, with a consequent reduction in the ranks of the high-achievers. Thus, competition for the best students will grow increasingly intense. Colleges will recruit heavily beyond state and regional boundaries, gathering good students wherever they find them. The South will be no exception.

To maintain its current academic quality, the college must then be capable of attracting stellar students from outside as well as within the region. Trustees and administrators agree. They believe that the college's future depends on becoming a truly national liberal arts college like an Amherst or a Kenyon College or a Williams or a Swarthmore. That, in turn, depends on two things: high academic quality and national recognition.

The pursuit of national prominence also confirms the college's heritage. Its long-established push to be the best at what it does — and its vision of the future. As Dr. Diehl observed in 1925: "We had before us ever the ideal of excellence, of the best for the purposes we had in mind."

Further, the undertaking promises to expand this region's supply of future leaders by keeping the area's best and brightest from seeking a quality education elsewhere, and by attracting talent from outside the region. To grow and prosper, a region must have human capital — thinkers, builders, and wise and just leaders.

Trustees and college officials consider the time ripe for becoming a national liberal arts college. With the reunion of the Northern and Southern



Southwestern is coming out of the shadows as it moves toward national prominence.

branches of the Presbyterian Church, Southwestern is for the first time related to a national church. The potential for success is further enhanced by the recent successes of the college's development campaign, the scholarship endowment provided by the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation, the quality and academic renown of present faculty, and the elevated scholastic standings of incoming students.

Below, and on the following pages, you will see that Southwestern's pursuit of national standing is an ambitious and complex goal. It will require the thinking and input of hundreds of people like you who care about Southwestern's future — alumni, students and faculty. And it will demand as much effort and energy of the current college family as it once did of its founders.

ACADEMIC QUALITY:

Ask a dozen people to list this country's best colleges or universities, and you'll get a dozen different rosters. Still, a number of institutions will invariably be on everyone's list.

Why? What separates the leaders, the top liberal arts institutions, from other fine colleges and universities?

Basically, there are two separate but related answers: academic quality and national recognition. Without the first, the second is unlikely and underserved.

Southwestern already has a highly-regarded — though under-recognized — academic program. That's evident in the high acceptance rate of Southwestern applicants to leading graduate and professional schools of business, medicine, international studies and dentistry, among others. Employers familiar with the college and its graduates likewise show their endorsement in repeatedly hiring and promoting Southwestern alumni. And high school counselors aware of Southwestern continue to direct their top students to the college.

Still, no institution can hope to get to the top standing still, administrators realize. They aim to build on the college's current academic strengths.

But how? What qualities make an institution a leader in learning?

While there is no universal yardstick of academic quality, the upper third of the 100 leading liberal arts

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