When he founded The College of Idaho 128 years ago, Dr. William Judson Boone professed an inclusive view of prospective students: “Let them come, let them all come, and we will see what they can do.” The commitment to welcoming students from all walks of life is as alive and well today at the College as it was in 1891. It is not only the right thing to do, it is beneficial for business.

We expect that there is little disagreement about the need to provide affordable higher education to deserving students or the need to ensure that all students have fair and unrestricted access to that education. We also have a responsibility to create a culture of belonging in which all students can thrive.

One of our Core Values is “Making the Circle Bigger.” Said differently, we want to embrace the diversity of thought, perspective, life experience and hometowns (be they rural or urban) that can only be achieved through the inclusion of all individuals.

To that end, we have developed strategic partnerships with businesses and philanthropists that understand the business case for diversity and inclusion and are investing in making The College of Idaho a welcoming place for all. One such partnership is with Wells Fargo. They understand the importance of educating all Idahoans and recognize the value of inclusive programs, which is why they are providing The College of Idaho with $150,000 to expand our reach with diversity and inclusion.

Another partnership is with the Davis United World College (UWC) Scholars Program. There are 18 UWC locations around the world. The first was established just after World War II to bring together students from different countries to learn and live together and hopefully prevent World War III. Businessman/philanthropist Shelby Davis provides eligible UWC graduates a $20,000/year scholarship to attend one of about 100 colleges in the United States including The College of Idaho (in fact, we enrolled the 2nd most new UWC students this past year of any school in the U.S.).

Our international student population is approaching 20% of the total student body and will represent nearly 80 countries on our campus this fall. For the approximately 60% of our students who come from Idaho—not just from the Boise Valley, but also from Pocatello, Filer, McCall, Post Falls and elsewhere—this provides local access to a global mindset without having to incur the cost of traveling and studying abroad. In a state like Idaho that has so many industries that operate internationally, this education is good for business.

During the summer, groups of students conduct research projects in biology, chemistry, and physics, oftentimes with just two or three students working directly with a professor. It is a great opportunity for students to make their own “circle bigger” – to embrace learning from one another. Working in one such small group is Boise’s Marcos Cervantes, who is teamed up with Azhar Koshkimbayeva from Kazakhstan. Marcos has found the collaboration enriching. “Coming from Boise, I never dreamed I would be doing chemistry research with someone from Kazakhstan, but getting to work closely with Azhar has been amazing. Not only is she a brilliant student, but I’ve learned that we have way more in common than we have differences.”

Inclusion is not a partisan issue. Our donors, students, faculty and staff span the spectrum of political views. We see it as not only the right thing to do, but a business imperative. Instead of forcing us to pick a side, diversity and inclusion is a win/win that should bring us together.

Diversity is simply a fact. It comes in many forms and is all around us. And inclusion is an attitude and mindset that we believe is the “Idaho Way” for the vast majority of Idahoans. We are a warm and welcoming people. We still make eye contact and we smile and wave to strangers on the street. The opposite of inclusion is exclusion. We do not know anyone who wants to exclude people from a quality education simply because they are different from us in some respects.

Hopefully, we can all continue to learn from our young people and let us focus more on the many things we have in common, the things that make us all unique, and less on the few things that pull us apart.

Doug Brigham

Jim Everett

College of Idaho Co-Presidents