

# So many questions . . .

## Veteran UVa-Wise professor Joseph M. Scolnick, Jr. wonders how different the people and region of Southwest Virginia would be without the College's presence

When I was invited to contribute this article, it was to be just an opinion piece, a jotting down of my personal views. I suppose my chief qualifications for writing this appear to be that I presumably know a good deal about the school and Southwest Virginia. I came to the College in the fall of 1973, and much has changed since I arrived here. For example, the College had 763 students in the fall semester of my first year, so we have more than doubled our size in many respects since then. The College and the region have developed. But what role have our alumni played in this growth?

Over the years, a large majority of government majors in my upper-level courses planned to teach in the local public schools or go to law schools and become practicing lawyers. Most of them probably achieved their goals, and a good number of them have worked or are working in Southwest Virginia today to the considerable benefit of the region. But now the questions begin. How many actually became teachers and lawyers? How many worked or are working in Southwest Virginia today? How many would not have held these positions if they had not gone to college here? How many would not even have gone to college at all if not to this College?

The questions continue. How many of my former students have served in the local governments of this region in either elective or appointive positions? Which positions were held and for how long? Going further, how many were active in local civic affairs, in what ways and for how long? How many former students would have done any of these things if they had never attended this College?

The questions expand further. For example, what would be the effect on Southwest Virginia if the College's students had not gone on to become doctors, dentists, merchants, accountants, social workers, mental and emotional health care professionals, public school teachers, public school administrators, athletic coaches, journalists, artists, musicians – the list just keeps growing as other worthy careers occur to me. What if these people had not gone to this College? What of the people who would never have gone to college at all if not to this College? Would they have held their positions today or even live in the region? If not, what a loss!

And still the questions continue to come. What of all the people, faculty or staff who have worked or are working at the College? Both faculty and staff are very important. Apart from their work at the College, what have they added to the region? How many have been involved in local government, engaged in civic activities, coached children's athletic teams, been active in cultural matters like Pro-Art? How many of the contributions made by these people to the region in the past 50 years would have never occurred if the College had not been created and grown as it has?

Again, what a terrible loss there would have been with the College absent from the picture.

What about the direct and indirect economic effects the College has had on the region? First, the salaries earned by the faculty and staff, the College expenses met, objects purchased, buildings built, and so on. This isn't to mention the overall economic effects made on the region by the College's expansion, with a large part of the funds directly or indirectly expended, invested, or banked here. I cannot begin to calculate all of this. The total financial effect on the region must be considerable.

UVa-Wise (and Clinch Valley College before it) has been a vigorous liberal arts college with an honor system. How has this fact affected the lives of the College's graduates? A liberal arts college should help people to develop their lives in positive ways. I believe this has occurred, but what hard evidence is there of it? Suppose this was not a liberal arts college and that the honor system never existed? Then what? Many people would be less, but how?

I have so many questions but just very rough estimates of the likely answers. The chief reason for this is obvious: something that initially seems simple is actually quite complex. There is almost certainly a common feeling that the College

has led to exceptionally important results with rather modest means and continues to do so today. This should definitely give a sense of satisfaction and pride to the people of this region.

So what has the College added to its former students' lives? How has it affected the region? Perhaps some of you who are reading this might be interested in sharing your thoughts or feelings on these matters with the Alumni Association. After all, your lives are an integral part of the College's history and affect the future of the region. The Alumni Association would like to hear from you. Drop them a line if you can.

May all of you be well.

