

Colorado College, The Rocky Mountain West, and The State of the Rockies Project

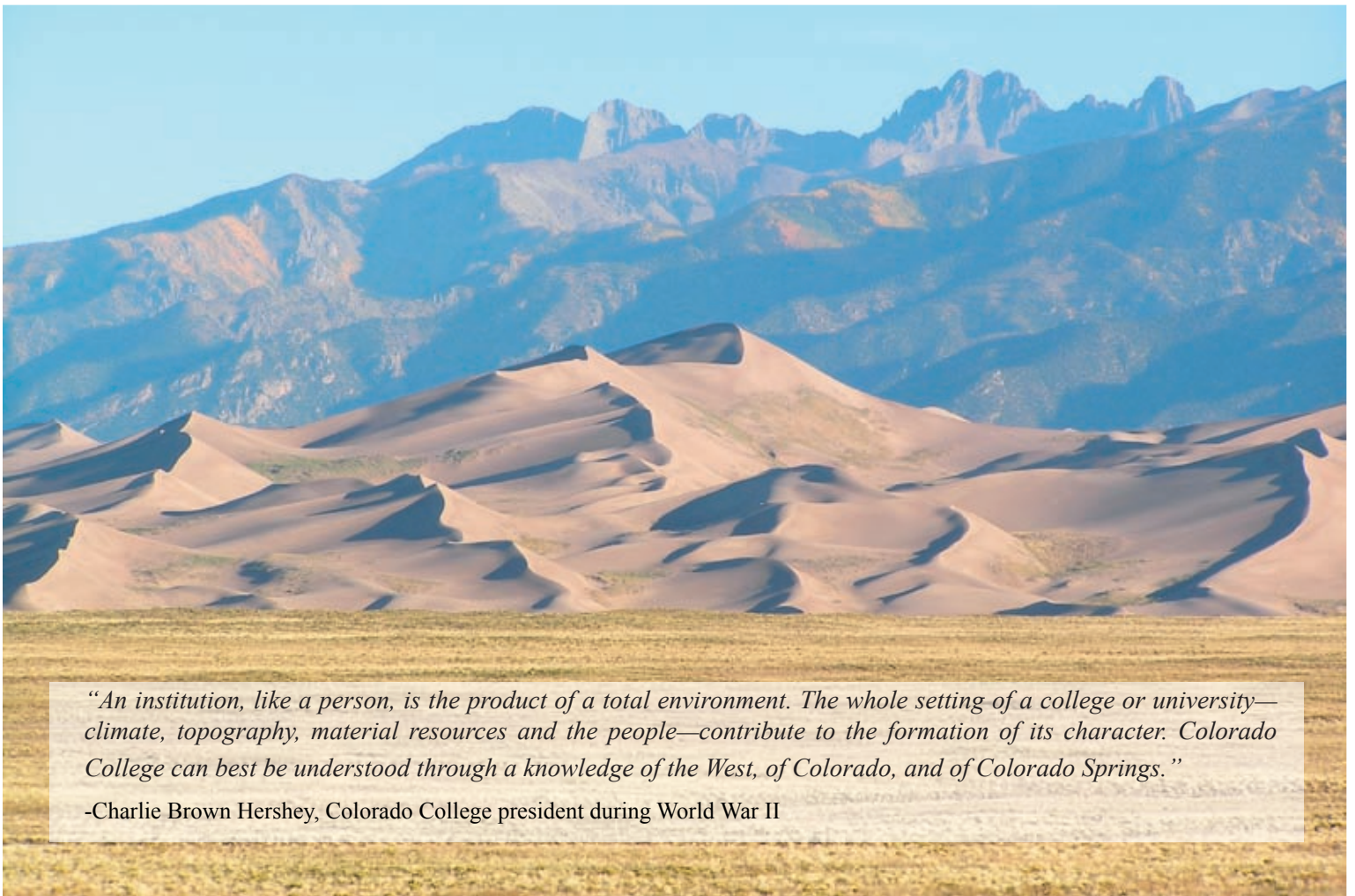
THE 2006 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

By Walter E. Hecox

Colorado College (CC) today, as it has been for the past 130 years, is strongly defined by location and events of the 1800s. Pikes Peak abruptly rises out of the high plains that extend from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers towards the west. This eastern-most sentinel of the Rocky Mountain chain of 14,000 ft. peaks first attracted early explorers and then was the focus of President Jefferson's call for the southern portion of the Louisiana Purchase to be mapped by Zebulon Pike in 1806. Gold seekers in 1858 spawned the start of the "Pikes Peak or Bust Gold Rush" of prospectors and all manner of suppliers to the mining towns. General William Jackson Palmer, while extending a rail line from Kansas City to Denver in 1869, camped near what is now Colorado City and fell in love with the view of Pikes Peak and red rock formations now called the Garden of the Gods. An entrepreneur and adventurer, he selected that site to found a new town with the dream that it would be a famous resort — complete with a college to bring education and culture to the region. Within five years, both Colorado Springs and Colorado College came into being in Colorado Territory, preceding Colorado statehood in 1876.

Early pictures of present day Cutler Hall, the first permanent building on campus that was completed in 1882, speak volumes to the magnificent scenery of Pikes Peak and the lonely plains. Katherine Lee Bates added an indelible image of the region. In 1893 she spent a summer teaching in Colorado Springs at a CC summer program and on a trip up Pikes Peak was inspired to write her "America the Beautiful" poem. It helped spread a celebration of the magnificent vistas and grandeur of Pikes Peak and the surrounding region — and provided bragging rights for CC as "The America the Beautiful College."

The last quarter of the 18th century was challenging both for Colorado Springs and Colorado College. Attempts to locate financial support in the East and ease the travails of a struggling college were grounded on the unique role of Colorado College in then-President Tenney's "New West" that encompassed the general Rocky Mountain region. His promotion of this small college spoke of Colorado College being on the "very verge of the frontier" with a mission to bring education and culture to a



"An institution, like a person, is the product of a total environment. The whole setting of a college or university—climate, topography, material resources and the people—contribute to the formation of its character. Colorado College can best be understood through a knowledge of the West, of Colorado, and of Colorado Springs."

-Charlie Brown Hershey, Colorado College president during World War II



State of the Rockies student research at Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado (opposite page), Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming (above), the Hideout Ranch, Wyoming (bottom left), Colorado College, Colorado (bottom middle), and Rocky Mountain Biological Lab in Gothic, Colorado (bottom right).

rugged land. Even then, Tenney saw the college as an ideal place to study anthropology and archeology, use the geology of the region as a natural laboratory, and serve the mining industry by teaching the science of mineralogy and metallurgy. In the early 1900s, a school of engineering was established at CC that offered degrees in electrical, mining, and civil engineering. General Palmer gave the college 13,000 acres of forest land at the top of Ute Pass, upon which a forestry school was built, the fifth forestry school created in the U.S. and the only one with a private forest.

Subsequent decades brought expansion of the college, wider recognition as a liberal arts college of regional and national distinction, and creation of innovative courses, majors, and programs. The unique Block Plan, implemented in 1970, consists of one-at-a-time courses that facilitate extended course field study, ranging across the Rockies and throughout the Southwest. Thus, CC has a rich history indelibly linked to the Rockies.

Today is no different. CC has new programs that meet evolving challenges in the Rockies, including environmental science and Southwest studies programs, a sustainable development workshop, and exciting field work offered by a variety of disciplines. Students can thoroughly explore the Rockies through the Block Plan.

The State of the Rockies Project

The Colorado College State of the Rockies Project is designed to provide a thoughtful, objective voice on regional issues by offering credible research on problems faced by the Rocky Mountain West, and through convening citizens and experts to discuss the future of our region. Each year, the project provides:

- Opportunities for collaborative student-faculty research partnerships
- A *State of the Rockies Report Card*
- A companion State of the Rockies Conference.

Taken together, these three arms of the State of the Rockies Project offer the tools, forum, and accessibility needed for Colorado College to foster a strong sense of citizenship for both our graduates and the broader regional community.

