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To promote learning through teaching, research, scholarship, creative accomplishment, and service.

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To be the leading student-centered research university with faculty, students, and staff sharing responsibility and working together for academic, professional, and personal growth.

Opening Remarks

Worldly Expectations

Comedian Steven Wright once said: "It's a small world, but I wouldn't want to have to paint it." That's no problem, since the Earth does a fine job of painting itself. Think of the kaleidoscope of colors it brushes across our landscapes, waters, and skies.

It can be incredibly refreshing to soak in these colors, but we never truly get an original look at the big picture—only glimpses, snapshots of scenery crossing our paths. That's why I'm always intrigued when an astronaut describes our world from above. In "Pioneering Spirit"—David Marc's feature story about NASA and the future of space exploration (page 26)—astronaut Eileen Collins '78 says that from space our atmosphere looks as thin as an eggshell. "You also see how beautiful the Earth is—the colors, the waters, the continents," she says. "You learn to love our planet and you want to take care of it."

Perhaps if we all shared this appreciation for the Earth, it would be a much better—and cleaner—place. Gone would be the reckless habits of those who view the world as their personal Dumpster. Gone would be the petty politics and self-interests that hamstring efforts to protect the environment. And gone would be the shortsighted actions that trash precious natural resources with little thought of tomorrow. Idealistic? Sure. But not unrealistic, especially if we step back every now and then and consider the big picture with foresight rather than hindsight. What we would see is that we're all spinning on this piece of property together, and we should cherish the ride, make the most of our time here, and continue learning what we can about this cosmic journey.

That's why no matter what anyone thinks of NASA, one thing we gain from its work is a sense of self and place. Space exploration provides us with a mirror on our world—an absolute perspective that puts us in our place as mere blips on the Big Screen. Just look at those dazzling pictures from the



Bryan Leister

Hubble Space Telescope, or think about scientists devoting endless hours of research to enable us to explore Mars. For all that NASA teaches us about the universe, it also shows us how unique the Earth is. This challenges us to look beyond ourselves and feeds our need to keep asking questions about who we are and where we're headed. And even when tragedy stirs doubt, it's important to remember that knowledge often arises from failure.

There is no simple solution to preserving our planet—and chances are it may survive us. But the more we realize what's at stake for all of humanity and our world, the more conscious we may become of our actions. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand this. All you really have to do is step outdoors into the night and gaze up at the stars to invoke your sense of wonder. The experience is both illuminating and humbling. It's also a reminder that without an appreciation for the Earth and the heavens above, our vision will be forever limited and we'll never unravel the mysteries within our grasp.

And who would want to paint that picture of the world?

JAY COX
Editor