I’ll never forget the day my father and I pulled into 105 Eden Street and I opened the passenger door and stood face-to-face with the whale skull that marks the entrance to COA. On that day in 1987 I fell head-over-heels with the place, the people, and the ideas of College of the Atlantic. I’ll also never forget my father’s first impression. His was more like: What is this place?

He never went to college, and a school on an island with 180 students and one major on a campus that had burned to the ground in 1983 didn’t line up with his expectations. But Dad trusted me. Without COA’s financial aid and without his trust, I’m not sure I would have made it. When I look back on that day, what strikes me is how far we’ve come.

Compared to ’87 and certainly compared to when the first students arrived on campus in 1972, we are a better, stronger institution. For the last three years, the Princeton Review has ranked us the number one school for the environment in the country; we’re in the USNWR top 100 liberal arts colleges and are the youngest college on that list – the average age of schools on the list is 165 years. Every year we get transfer applicants from other colleges. This year those applicants come to us from Wellesley, Earlham, Oberlin, Pomona, RISD, Bard, Wesleyan, Lewis and Clark, and the Olin School of Engineering – elite institutions, excellent students, but students who wanted more and found it in us. The student and faculty population of COA has more than doubled; the endowment has gone from zero to $60 million; the student body has gone from relatively homogenous to wildly diverse – today’s students number 350 and come from 47 countries and 42 states, and from all walks of life. But it’s not just about how far we’ve come; it’s about how we’ve come so far.

Rather than chasing fleeting trends, we’re better and stronger because we’ve remained true to a mission with two key elements:

1. Build a college of human ecology and cultivate students’ passion for serving the wider world, passion for creative scrappiness, and passion for entrepreneurship; seed the world with people armed with those tools and take on wicked problems at the boundary between humanity and the environment.

2. Build a college that is committed to Genius Loci – Genius Loci, the spirit of place – where the place, MDI, and the college are made better by one another. That is the true genius of COA – a bimodal mission of serving the planet and the Island.
We celebrate that mission, celebrate COA’s past successes, and celebrate the campaign for our future, which we’ve named *A Broad Reach*.

Our success begins with our alumni in the wider world. Although every college on the planet has great alumni, ours play a disproportionally important role in stewarding the planet. There are only 2500 of us, but we fight way above our weight class. Alumni like Chellie Pingree, Scott Kraus, Nell Newman, Greg Stone, Cathy Johnson, Bill Ginn – they are the politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, lawyers, and artists steering a course toward a better future. But our success is also measured in how we’ve shaped the island, and begins with COA as a community of 500 people, which, by itself, is an important economic entity for MDI.

More importantly, though, consider the research and work of our faculty and students:

- ending the threat of a cruise ship pier in Bar Harbor;
- changing shipping lanes in the Gulf of Maine to protect the endangered Right Whale;
- inspiring aquaculture to economically diversify the coastline;
- leading research throughout Acadia National Park;
- bringing peregrine falcons back to MDI;
- driving sustainable agriculture and fighting food insecurity;
- bringing renewable energy to Island families and institutions; and
- bringing year-round businesses back to Northeast Harbor.

Then consider the COA alumni who’ve made MDI their home:

- We are the founders of Havana, Chocolatte, House Wine, Reel Pizza, the Criterion, Café This Way;
- We are the teachers in the Island school system and the founders of The Community School;
- We are the health care workers in area hospitals;
- We are the architects, builders, and landscape architects who sculpt the island;
- We are the staff of Friends of Acadia, Acadia National Park, and Maine Coast Heritage Trust;
- We are DiverEd.

About 200 alumni have built families, businesses, and community on MDI: Imagine an MDI without COA; it would be a much less interesting, much less livable place.

The *Broad Reach* campaign is the most ambitious in the history of our college and, in just eighteen months, we have raised $39 million of a $50M goal. That’s cause for celebration. It is reaffirming and exciting to see friends step up and make the largest gift they’ve ever made to COA or to any institution.

These commitments and this campaign position us to confront an entirely different world than the one we faced fifty years ago:
In 1972, when students first arrived at COA, the human population was 3.8 billion; that figure has doubled.

In 1972, each person on the planet emitted four tons of carbon dioxide a year; that figure has increased by 25% in 50 years.

In 1972, Arpanet, the progenitor to the Internet, was born. 99.9% of the world didn’t care or couldn’t understand or simply was not exposed to the discovery. Today, 55% of the world uses the internet and five billion people have cell phones;

In 1972, we entered a period known as AI winter, where the innovations around artificial intelligence came to standstill; today, through machine learning, a computer can learn chess on its own, in four hours, and turn around and beat the Grand Masters.

In 1972, 37% of the world lived in cities, today we are 56% urban.

In 1972, Acadia counted 1.6 million visits, that number has doubled.

The fact is, we live in a larger, more connected, more urbanized island and world where the line between human and machine is difficult to distinguish. We are bringing machines into our bodies and instilling our humanity – our intellect – into machines. In feeding this cybernetic world with the food and energy it wants, we are destabilizing the planet and, although a privileged few will thrive, most will be utterly helpless. Our times are tumultuous, but also exciting and hopeful. I’m optimistic and hopeful knowing places like COA continue to thrive: we need a College of the Atlantic more now than ever before.

The Broad Reach campaign isn’t just gathering needed resources; it’s about ensuring a thriving COA able to take on the vastly different world we find ourselves in:

- By endowing faculty chairs so we can continue to bring the best teachers to the college;
- By endowing scholarships so that the best students can attend COA, regardless of their financial background;
- By expanding our work in written and oral communication and our work on the waters of the Gulf of Maine;
- By building COA student housing to invigorate the campus community;
- By making COA the first college in the country to eliminate fossil fuels from our campus;
- By building a 29,000 square foot academic center called the Center for Human Ecology with new labs, studios, workshops, faculty offices, and lecture halls.

COA and MDI are places known as *Thin Places*, where the distance between heaven and earth is compressed. We need thin places. Again, there is no better time than right now for a place like COA. I look forward to working with all of you on this campaign. Thank you.
Darron Collins ’92, PhD
COA President