

**INTERDISCIPLINARY**

**INNOVATION:** New departments reflect Agnes Scott's commitment to learning across disciplines.

**THE ART OF THINKING WELL:**

Council of Independent Colleges  
President Marjorie Hass reflects on the value and pleasures of the liberal arts.

**CAREER JOURNEYS:**

Agnes Scott's Career Exploration Center supports students' professional success.

# AGNES SCOTT

FALL '24

## THE MAGAZINE



# Tomorrow's Skills Today

**Agnes Scott's liberal arts education empowers students to claim their place as leaders in the workplace.**

# The Art of Thinking Well

*Council of Independent Colleges President Marjorie Hass reflects on the value and pleasures of the liberal arts.*

BY MEILEE D. BRIDGES

As president of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), Marjorie Hass leads the organization's efforts to support independent colleges and universities and promote their contributions to society. As the former president of Rhodes College and Austin College, she has a deep understanding of the benefits of a broad-based education grounded in interdisciplinary inquiry. And as a lifelong learner and scholar, she is a champion of the liberal arts.

In today's politically polarized climate, the word *liberal* in the term *liberal arts* is often misconstrued. It's more precise to trace the word back to its Latin root, *liber*, which means *free*. That freedom—or liberation—is central to the liberal arts.

"The liberal arts are about liberation from your internal impulses, habits of mind, tendencies toward error and prejudices," Hass says. "The art of liberal arts is really the art of thinking. It's about pressing yourself to open up even your deepest convictions to potential criticisms or reevaluations."

## SKILLS FOR LIVING AND LEADING

Students at liberal arts colleges cultivate the art of thinking through an interdisciplinary approach to education that incorporates experiential learning and

real-world experience. Hass notes that the ultimate reward of a liberal arts education is the development of "skills of reasoning and interpretation to arrive at truths and meaning"—skills that serve students well beyond commencement.

While these skills are critical in today's workplace, they also play a key role as society grapples with technological advances. Digital literacy has become especially important in an age of social media, deep fakes and artificial intelligence. Hass notes that distinguishing reality from fiction requires discernment and analysis and that liberal arts students gain these skills by studying everything from history and literature to science and psychology.

"We're living through massive, radical change," Hass says, noting that technology has changed us "in ways we can't always predict and sometimes even now struggle to understand."

While equipping students with resilience in the face of such change, institutions like Agnes Scott College teach enduring liberal arts skills: critical-thinking, problem-solving, communication and the scientific method. These skills, not coincidentally, are also crucial for leaders.

"Leadership is inspiring others to take action in the service of a more positive vision," says Hass, who

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attributes her own ability to lead to her training as a philosopher. Great leaders inspire others by articulating a positive vision of organizations, institutions and communities—and the liberal arts are key.

“They certainly hone your ability to critique the way things are, but also to identify and imagine a world that is different, but better, from the one we inhabit,” Hass says.

## CULTIVATING A LIBERAL ARTS MINDSET

Liberal arts institutions face tremendous pressures today: diminished public trust in higher education, a shrinking college-age population, competition, and even questions about return on investment. This is why, Hass says, Scotties must “proudly bear the banner of their liberal arts education to ensure that the people they interact with understand how their strengths were nurtured at Agnes Scott.”

Beyond trumpeting and giving back to their alma

mater, graduates can cultivate liberal arts values in their own lives even after they walk across that stage.

“College is such a rare occasion where your primary responsibility is learning,” Hass says. “After graduation, you have to intentionally pursue learning—not just learning how to use the new system at your office, but the open-ended learning that you did in college that includes reading, thinking and discussion.”

Indeed, liberal arts colleges are known for producing lifelong learners. Hass encourages Agnes Scott alumnae to continue to commit themselves to contemplation and question what they read and believe in order to open themselves up to opportunities for surprise, joy and delight.

“The pleasure that comes with the flash of insight is bound up in the liberal arts, so we don’t want to lose that side of it,” Hass says. “It’s not just all about practical applications; it’s also about making our lives richer and more meaningful.”



*Marjorie Hass speaks frequently on leadership, shared governance and the independent sector in higher education.*



# The Main Effect

*The largest building renovation in campus history preserves the past while looking to the future.*

BY MEILEE D. BRIDGES



When Agnes Scott “Main” Hall was constructed in 1891, it sported the most modern features of the time. The first building in DeKalb County lit with electricity, Main Hall was heated by steam, had running water of more than one temperature and even boasted sanitary plumbing. During its 133-year history, the building has served as a residence hall for students, a home for administrative offices and a Hollywood filming location. The High Victorian Gothic edifice is also an indelible landmark in alumnae memories: Scotties reminisce about sneaking out after curfew, rollerblading indoors and celebrating first jobs and grad school acceptances by ringing the bell in the iconic bell tower.

“If you were to ask any student to draw the building that most represented the college, I have a feeling they’d pick Main,” says Kimberly Reeves ’12, executive director of the Center for Sustainability. “It’s just part of our mind map of campus.”

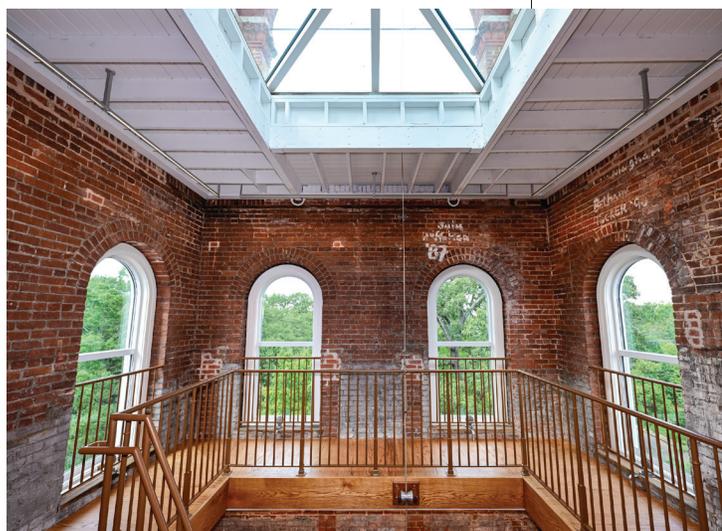
Even with such a distinguished legacy, it recently became clear that Main Hall was overdue for a significant renovation. Closed to students in 2018 and with construction delayed by COVID-19, the building reopened in August 2024 to great fanfare, including a rededication in October. The ceremony’s guests included many of the 650+ generous individual and foundation donors who made possible the largest building renovation in Agnes Scott College’s history.

## MODERNIZING A HISTORIC ICON

One stage of the construction entailed much-needed upgrades. For example, students residing on the top three floors can enjoy—for the first time in the building’s history—air conditioning (the HVAC system is cleverly hidden from street view on the new roof). The \$35 million project also included adding a new elevator,



## As a national leader in climate action, Agnes Scott prioritized carbon neutrality commitments in renovating Main Hall.



repairing and waterproofing the foundation, replacing all the windows and restoring the exterior walls.

Student Government Association President Insherah Qazi '26, who lives in Main Hall, thanked the donors for these upgrades during the rededication ceremony: “Thanks to you, our residence hall is beautiful, efficient and has a working elevator. With inviting study rooms and warm common areas, we finally have a space that feels like home, where we can support each other through late-night study sessions, share meals and build friendships that will last long after graduation.”

The bell tower features a skylight and picture window, and in addition to the traditional bell rope, a button makes the long-treasured tradition of bell-ringing accessible to all students. Main Hall also now houses the Career Exploration Center. The center’s

prominent location—on the first floor opposite the president’s office—signifies the college’s dedication to advancing student and alumnae success.

### TOWARD A GREENER FUTURE

As a national leader in climate action, Agnes Scott prioritized carbon neutrality commitments in renovating Main Hall. Reeves points to the college’s recent embodied carbon report, which describes the measurable climate benefits that can be achieved through responsible reuse of existing buildings.

“This reinvestment in existing facilities over time, compared with replacing buildings when they need substantial renewal, has resulted in avoiding carbon emissions,” Reeves says.



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A new solar array atop the college’s parking facility, for instance, is offsetting 58 percent of Main Hall’s projected electricity usage, which includes the HVAC system. In addition, Jenkins•Peer Architects installed daylighting, low-flow water features and LED light bulbs. Designers then used paint and furniture with low volatile organic compounds to improve indoor air quality.

“All of these factor into what we’re projecting as a strong LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] Gold certification,” Reeves says—making Main Hall the fourth building on campus with LEED certification.

Nearly doubling the college’s solar production and introducing sustainability features throughout Main Hall are propelling Agnes Scott toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2037.

“We have reduced our scopes 1 and 2 [i.e., produced, purchased and used greenhouse gas] emissions by 51.8 percent, so we’re over halfway to our carbon neutrality goal,” Reeves says. “Projects like this are definitely the way that we’ll continue toward meeting that goal.”

### PRESERVING MAIN’S DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER

Historic preservation also was key to Main Hall’s renovation. The configurations of specific spaces, such as the laundry room, may have shifted, but the building’s interior footprint remains substantially unchanged. Maintaining the building’s terra cotta and marble features was crucial, and its architectural style is still consistent with the rest of campus. The wood floors—refinished and stained—retain their familiar squeakiness.

“During my second year, my roomies and I lived in one of the famed tower rooms,” says Clair McLeod Muller '67. “Not only did the room have wonderful views out the many windows, but it also was the scene of many impromptu birthday celebrations for friends on the hall.”

Kim Siegelson '84 comes from a family of Scotties. She reflected on the beauty of the Agnes Scott campus at the October rededication of Main Hall: “As I look around the campus where my sister and I spent our college years, it’s easy to imagine my young aunt here because so many of the original buildings have been beautifully preserved, including this one. Our footsteps fall in some of the same places, our desks face some of the same windows, and we rest in the shade of the same old trees, grown taller. It’s one of the things that makes Agnes Scott very special.”

Alumnae can also rest assured that the signatures once furtively inscribed on the bell tower walls, which began appearing as early as the 1910s, have



been carefully preserved. While the worn wooden tower staircase has been removed, the signed beams are now on display in the bell tower foyer and the student residential lobby. The workers also protected the fascinating relics they discovered when taking the interior down to the studs.

“One of my favorite things they found was the signature of the college’s plumber from the early 1900s,” says Reeves, noting that the crew placed it behind plexiglass in the southwest stairwell. “It used to be hidden, but now it’s an Easter egg.”

### A FAMILIAR SENSE OF PLACE

Today, the much-loved Main Hall has been restored to its original grandeur—though it’s more inviting and less imposing. Alumnae and visitors are paying attention to aesthetic elements they never noticed before, including decorative brickwork and the pink pillars fronting the vestibule.

“There are intentional gathering spaces and places where you can host workshops and events. There’s an ability to know your roommates and hallmates even better and create lasting memories,” Reeves says. “Whether you live there one year or multiple years, Main has that sense of place that fosters the community that is Agnes Scott.”

Room plaques connect past to present and future, with current students living and studying in spaces named for and by alumnae who contributed to the Campaign for Main. This connection within and across generations of Scotties is palpable.

“The women who lived in Main Hall continue to be my ‘collected family,’” says Susie Ham Deiters '80. “We understand the enduring bond of our time at Agnes Scott—sharing classes, eating together, brushing teeth together, living in the same place. We know that our Scottie friends exist in a separate category from any others.”



## Magnolias Metamorphosed

While Main Hall is both a campus icon and a model of sustainable practices, so is Agnes Scott's Level II accredited arboretum. This verdant tree canopy once included several towering magnolias, more than 60 feet tall, that shaded the northeast corner of campus, just in front of Rebekah Scott Hall. These trees were originally transplanted as seedlings by Professor Christian Dieckmann, who joined the college as a piano teacher in 1905 and retired as chair of the music department 45 years later.

The renovation of Rebekah Hall, completed in 2018, resulted in the removal of Dieckmann's magnolias—with the blessing of the professor's daughter, Adele Dieckmann McKee '48, who still resides near campus. However, the college wanted to honor the significance of the trees and help their story live on. Agnes Scott worked with local artisans the Jack Ellis Company to repurpose the wood salvaged from the beloved magnolias.

"Right after milling the magnolia slabs, we knew we had something special," says Whitney Wolf, founder and principal of the Jack Ellis Company. "I had never milled Magnolia wood before. It is absolutely beautiful inside. It perfectly correlates to how the tree grows—slowly, with lots of low-hanging branches that extend far and horizontal. This growth makes for all kinds of knots, which translates into character, and the color and grain are very different from any other domestic species."

The process was not without its challenges. The air-drying phase alone took four years, requiring the removal of three times the moisture usually found in other woods. Because magnolias are slow-growing trees, their wood is harder and heavier than the pine or oak most often used to build furniture. The result of the woodworkers' craftsmanship can be seen in Main Hall's Dieckmann Conference Room and in the President's Conference Room, where students, alumnae, faculty and staff can now admire stately conference tables notable for their distinctive grain.

"Every bit of the wood was reused and recycled after its original intended purpose was met. The carbon footprint was incredibly minimal from tree to table," Wolf says. "It's like the Shel Silverstein

book *The Giving Tree*: At the end of it all, the tree had another purpose, fortunately at the same home where that seed was first sprung."

The tables represent just another aspect of Agnes Scott's commitment to historic preservation and sustainability. Though transformed, these functional but beautiful pieces pay tribute to a respected music professor and the majestic magnolias that once bore his name.

