

**LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES IN  
AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**



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## INTRODUCTION

This ACLS Occasional Paper presents the proceedings of a conference on “Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities” convened by ACLS in November 2003 in Williamstown, Massachusetts with the support of the Oakley Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences at Williams College and the collaboration of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Eighteen speakers on five panels focused on historical perspectives, fiscal pressures, professional life, student achievement, and the future of liberal arts colleges. The papers delivered were revised following discussion and an additional entry, Michael McPherson’s, was solicited for this volume. Including Dr. McPherson, ten current or former college presidents participated in this discussion.

Williamstown was a particularly appropriate site for these deliberations, even apart from the beautiful settings and the superlative hospitality. Memories of Williamstown once prompted the former president of Hiram College and future president of the United States, James A. Garfield, to define “[t]he ideal college” as Williams College president “Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and [a] student on the other.” As Williams College Professor of History *emeritus* Frederick Rudolph notes, Garfield’s statement reflected momentary unintentional nostalgia, “for henceforth the ideal that he evoked would compete at ever-increasing disadvantage with a host of new ideals” of higher education.<sup>1</sup> Professor Rudolph chronicles how the ideals of the American college changed in

response to the rise of the American university, even as collegiate ideals came to be part of the university's texture.

But if the liberal arts college is not just a Socratic redoubt in an age of corporatized higher education, how are we to think about it? Francis Oakley provides a provocative formulation. These institutions are, he writes in the prologue to this volume, "small college-universities devoted exclusively (or almost exclusively) to the teaching of undergraduates." Having stipulated this relationship of institutional paradigms, Frank then inverts the question. Rather than ask how colleges differ from universities, he proposes that we might consider what the uncollegiate university can learn from the college-university. After all, these college-universities "produce a pattern of consistently positive student outcomes not found in any other type of American higher-education institution" and "come closer than any other type of institution in the American higher education system to achieving a balance between research and teaching" in the careers of faculty members.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps James Garfield is still on to something, and an ideal model is to be found in Williamstown or on other campuses across the country. This possibility was one motive for mounting the conference recorded here.

It was Frank Oakley who guided the design and preparation for this meeting, who secured funding for it, and who was its lively host. When, in 2002, having earlier been Chair of its Board, he returned to ACLS to serve as its interim president after the death of John D'Arms, he brought with him a rich backlog of experience and reflection concerning the liberal arts in general and the liberal arts college in particular. He had served at Williams as faculty member, dean of the faculty and president of the college, and was currently serving as a trustee of the National Humanities Center, North Carolina, and as a co-chair of the Steering Committee for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' "Initiative for the Humanities and Culture."<sup>3</sup> And, as he notes, when he arrived he found that ACLS had already begun to focus on the particular career paths of faculty at liberal arts colleges.

This focus developed through a series of "conversations," structured but also open-ended discussions convened by ACLS to help

inform the operation and development of our programs. A 1998 meeting with mid-career faculty from a variety of institutions turned our attention to liberal arts colleges when one participant emphasized how the distinctive cultures of these institutions channeled intellectual and professional energies in special ways. We convened a further conversation, this time with presidents and deans of nine leading liberal arts colleges, which reinforced the sense that the career path of their faculty might merit special consideration from funding agencies such as ACLS. Finally, we held yet another conversation, this one with senior faculty from these institutions. Participants in this conversation articulated the characteristics of scholarship and teaching nurtured at liberal arts colleges. As one recent recipient of an ACLS Fellowship, a member of a college faculty, subsequently wrote to us:

Liberal arts colleges typically place a very high priority on teaching. Yet to teach well a faculty member must be an active participant in research—not only by keeping up with the current literature, but by actively engaging that literature in ways that, by being subject to peer review, sharpen his/her critical understanding of the material. Faculty research is, therefore, clearly beneficial for accomplishing one of the central aims of a liberal arts education: fostering in students critical thinking skills and a lifelong passion for learning.

Another ACLS Fellow, also from a liberal arts college, articulates how the need for fellowships related to the mission of those institutions:

At their best, scholars working in liberal arts colleges teach what they “do.” Thus, any agency which allows them to do what they do better—with less distraction and with greater intensity over a longer period of time—will also provide students with more to learn. Conversely, teachers working at a liberal arts college “do” what they teach—which is to say (at their best) they formulate

scholarly problems that actually matter to those who are not (yet, and probably never will be) in their fields, namely their students. In my experience (after teaching at a liberal arts college for almost twenty-five years), this actually works. Thus, for any agency interested in the creation of knowledge, especially knowledge that makes a difference in the world, such funding would be a good investment indeed.

As the essays that follow attest, the frame of the Williamstown conference encompassed such questions of faculty development and scholarly formation, but widened to include also the relationship between intellectual mission and economic constraints of the college-university, the history of these institutions, and their distinctive effectiveness in undergraduate education.

This volume most certainly does not conclude our interest in the future of liberal arts colleges. Largely as a result of the Williamstown Conference, ACLS has convened a working group, with support from the Teagle Foundation, that is examining assumptions about the scholar-teacher model, its viability, and its relation to the success of general liberal arts education. A grant from the Henry Luce Foundation supports an innovative exchange program between U.S. colleges and universities in Vietnam, where the practices of the college-university—the full integration of research and teaching, fostering a high level of student engagement across a broad range of disciplines, and promoting learning through undergraduate research—are not well established.

Thanks are due to many colleagues who worked carefully and hard to bring about this volume and the conference that inspired it. Frank Oakley's paper is but one of his many contributions to this effort, to ACLS, and to the humanities as a whole. His colleagues at Williams College and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute joined him as gracious and generous hosts: Robert D. Kavanaugh, Rosemary Lane, and Michael Ann Holly. At ACLS, Donna Heiland, Steven Wheatley, Barbara Henning and Rebecca Baxter helped with the design and execution of the conference.



## INTRODUCTION

ACLS Program Officer Suzy Beemer was essential to all phases of this project, and deserves special recognition as the editor of this volume. I am sure the authors of the following papers join me in thanking her for her careful and collegial execution of that difficult task. Candace Frede, assisted by Barbara Henning, carried out the production and publication of this volume with her usual skill and dedication.

We have dedicated this volume to Christina Elliott Sorum of Union College, a lively participant at Williamstown. Her passing in May 2005 deprived us all of a clear, strong voice for liberal education.

*Pauline Yu*  
President  
American Council of Learned Societies

## Notes

1. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) 243.
2. Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students." *Daedalus* 128 (Winter 1999), 77, 91.
3. See his *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and *The Leadership Challenge of a College Presidency: Meaning, Occasion, and Voice* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); and his essay "Ignorant Armies and Nighttime Clashes: Changes in the Humanities Classroom, 1970-1995," in *What's Happened to the Humanities?*, ed. Alvin Kernan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997) 63-83.

## PROLOGUE

### The Liberal Arts College: Identity, Variety, Destiny

*Francis Oakley*

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When I returned to the American Council of Learned Societies in 2002, I was delighted to discover that, with the thoughtful prompting of the late John D'Arms, the Council had begun to focus its attention on the liberal arts college sector, the oldest and deepest stratum in the complex geology of American higher education. The present conference is one of the outcomes of that initiative, and its subject calls to mind—or, at least, calls to my mind—a story told about Winston Churchill in his latter years.

On one occasion (possibly apocryphal, it doesn't really matter) Churchill is described as having been introduced in somewhat jocular fashion to a large audience filling a grand concert hall. In the course of introducing him, the Scottish master of ceremonies, sadly unable to claim the great man as a fellow Scot, did what may have struck him as the next best thing and noted proudly that Churchill must surely have consumed during his lifetime enough Scotch whiskey to fill the entire auditorium up to the level of the first balcony. Hearing those words Churchill, who up to that moment had been slumped listlessly in his chair, aroused himself, looked intently at the first balcony, and then allowing a ruminative eye to wander up to the second and then to the third, growled in inimitable fashion, "So much done. So much yet to do!"

As I contemplate the challenges confronting American higher education in general and the liberal arts college sector of that great (if unruly) enterprise in particular, I am struck by the pertinence of

those words. And, so far as our liberal arts colleges are concerned, I believe that three obstacles stand in the way of a realistic appraisal of what has already been achieved and what we have yet to do. First, the problem of identity. What is it, after all, that we really are? Second, the surprising variety and range of the differences among us, differences only partly caught by the 1994 Carnegie Classifications' division of the universe of colleges into Baccalaureate (or Liberal Arts) Colleges I and II.<sup>1</sup> Third, the degree to which talk about the liberal arts sector of American higher education has come to be embedded in one or another narrative of decline. About such talk, after all, there tends so often to be something of a dying fall, a whiff, if you wish, of "downhill all the way." And I believe that to be unfortunate.

Let me proceed by addressing these three obstacles in turn.

First, to ask "what is it that we are?" is not a redundancy. Recall the fact that, exactly a century ago, David Starr Jordan, the distinguished founding president of Stanford University, in an early formulation of the declension narrative, confidently predicted that with time "the college will disappear, in fact, if not in name. The best will become universities, the others will return to their place as academies"—return, that is, to being advanced-level secondary schools.<sup>2</sup>

I cite this interesting (if condescending) judgment less to belabor the point that he was wrong in his prediction of the collegiate future than to insist that he was also wrong in his understanding of the collegiate past. He participated, in effect, in a widespread confusion about the institutional origin and institutional status of the American college—a confusion that persists even now among Europeans and Americans alike. Some of the old residential colleges which constituted the norm in American higher education prior to the late-19th-century advent of the modern research university may well have started out as schools (Williams itself, indeed, is one example), but as *colleges* they did not trace their institutional lineage back to any sort of academy for secondary education. Their forebears, instead, were the constituent colleges of Oxford and Cambridge and, more precisely, beyond them the single-college

universities that had appeared in the 15th and 16th centuries in Spain, Scotland, and Ireland—and which, unlike the Oxbridge colleges, possessed the crucial and distinctive prerogative attaching to university status: namely, that of granting degrees. Trinity College, Dublin, was the classic example—or Dublin University, as it was sometimes called, or, better, and with greater legal and institutional precision, the University of Trinity College, Dublin.<sup>3</sup> And I would add that, if we chose to look north of the border, we would find that the constituent colleges of the University of Toronto, originally independent, freestanding universities and still intent on protecting their continuing right to confer certain degrees, call themselves the University of Victoria College, the University of St. Michael's College, and so on.

The sharp distinction between college and university which people like President Jordan instinctively advanced (and which we all too often assume) was something, then, of a late-19th-century American novelty, one spawned by the enormous contemporary admiration for the German research university and by the concomitant attempt, at places like Johns Hopkins, Clark, Cornell, Chicago, and Stanford universities, to replicate its particular characteristics on American soil. And that distinction, I submit, has not always been a helpful one. It has tended to promote the idea that the freestanding, residential liberal arts college is something *less* than the modern American university rather than something *other* than that. It has even encouraged colleges to permit themselves to be defined by what they lack—great research libraries and laboratories, graduate and professional schools—rather than in terms of what they proudly *possess*, an undistracted and undiffused intensity of focus on a broadly based education in the arts and sciences which has long become wholly extraordinary, not only abroad but increasingly so here in the United States, as well as the firm and unswerving commitment to bring to the education of undergraduates the full resources appropriate to a small university. For that, willy-nilly, is what we are: small college-universities devoted exclusively (or almost exclusively) to the teaching of undergraduates.

But these college-universities, to turn now to the second of the three obstacles to understanding mentioned at the outset, come in different shapes and sizes. The point is worth emphasizing if we are to be even remotely accurate in our appraisal of the current status and future prospects of the liberal arts college sector. According to the Carnegie Classifications, after all, there are more than 3,500 institutions of higher education in the United States.<sup>4</sup> During the late, unlamented culture wars nonetheless, the bulk of negative critical commentary directed at American higher education—frequently characterized by sweeping and sensationalist claims and a truly shoddy species of disheveled anecdotalism—was based on what was going on (or, rather, alleged to be going on) at probably no more than a dozen of the nation’s leading research universities and liberal arts colleges. Similarly, in making judgments about the liberal arts college sector (and I direct this warning as much at myself as anyone else) it is all too easy to forget that, according at least to the 1994 Carnegie Classifications, there were over 600 such colleges, and instinctively to ground one’s appraisal of them on the conditions prevailing at an exceptionally favored handful of prominent, well-endowed, and highly selective colleges in the Liberal Arts I group.

But to do so is simply not good enough. The range of differences among the institutions in the liberal arts sector is really quite broad. “In certain respects,” indeed, those colleges have been judged to be “more diverse than any other type of higher-education institution.”<sup>5</sup> And the diversity in question extends well beyond the normal distinctions between private and publicly controlled, single-sex and coeducational, secular and religiously affiliated, historically black institutions and the rest. It reflects also differences in curricular structure and favored pedagogic mode, differences in the degree to which faculties are committed to and actually involved in scholarly research and writing, and differences in the level of academic preparation of the students admitted. This last differential is linked further with markedly varying levels of selectivity in the admissions process, as well as with other differences flowing from the highly uneven distribution of financial resources among the

universe of colleges, with only a handful truly able to operate on the basis of need-blind admissions and need-based aid, and with a few of the most affluent among them able to spend five times as much per student as can the less well-endowed.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond all of that, moreover, the marked degree of institutional diversity evident in the liberal arts college sector reflects the fact that in terms of their prevailing curricular focus a majority of the 637 colleges listed in the 1994 Carnegie Classifications do not really appear to be *liberal arts* colleges at all. The earnest proclamation by many such colleges of a liberal-arts-oriented educational mission is often not matched by the curricular realities themselves, which turn out, instead, to be overwhelmingly vocational or preprofessional. A decade ago, David Breneman found that when one applies the admittedly “weak criterion” constituted by the awarding of at least 40 percent of their degrees in the liberal arts (as opposed to professional) fields, the total universe of private liberal arts colleges had to be more than halved, thereby reducing the number to a total of 212.<sup>7</sup>

A salutary clarification, of course, but the 212 survivors still manifest among themselves a considerable degree of diversity, and the sharp reduction in numbers strongly suggests—to turn now to the third obstacle to understanding mentioned at the outset—that narratives of decline may well, after all, be the appropriate context in which to attempt an appraisal of the current standing and future prospects of the liberal arts college.

So far as numbers go, the downward trajectory would indeed appear to be unquestionable. As recently as the mid-1950s, liberal arts colleges constituted around 40 percent of the total number of institutions of higher education, and they enrolled about 25 percent of all undergraduates. By the early 1970s they had come to account for only about a quarter of all institutions and enrolled no more than eight percent of all students. Over the subsequent decades the loss of ground has continued, if at a slower pace, and the decline involved has not simply been proportionate. Between 1967 and 1990 some 167 private four-year colleges disappeared, either by closure or by merger.<sup>8</sup> And to such losses one should properly add

those called for by Breneman's exercise in reclassification. In relation to the latter, of course, it has since been pointed out that "except for the altogether atypical period from 1956-1970, many L[iberal] A[rts] II colleges [had] never awarded a large percentage of liberal arts degrees." Of the "317 institutions that didn't meet Breneman's criterion in 1987" and had to be reclassified therefore as "small professional colleges," it turns out that at least 164 would not have met that criterion already in 1956. But if, accordingly, and taking the longer perspective, the shift of liberal arts colleges to professional status was not quite as dramatic as he supposed,<sup>9</sup> it was still pretty dramatic, and the overall pattern of shrinkage or decline in the liberal arts college sector would still appear to be striking and incontestable.

That said, there still remain forms of significance other than the statistical, and I want to suggest, the drop in numbers notwithstanding, that the declension narrative may still serve to mislead. Certainly, so far as the liberal arts college sector is concerned, it is far from catching or disclosing the full story, which conveys, or so I would suggest, some real grounds for encouragement.

What do I have in mind when I say that? Well, in the first place, a whole cluster of things pertaining to the sort of education students receive at these colleges, to the unabashed orientation of these institutions to student needs, to student satisfaction, and to "educational outcomes." At its best, it has been said, the liberal arts college—small, residential, comparatively intimate, relying for its teaching on fully qualified and committed faculty, and not dependent on graduate students—"remains almost a unique embodiment of a certain ideal of educational excellence."<sup>10</sup> That claim is surely warranted. Commentators on these colleges have remarked repeatedly on their single-minded focus on the education of undergraduates; on the unusual strength of their orientation to students and student needs; on the degree to which students at these colleges are themselves "more satisfied with the faculty, the quality of teaching, and the general education program" than are "students attending other types of institutions"; on their incorporation of "a wide range of exemplary educational practices in their educational

programs”; and on their ability to “produce a pattern of consistently positive student outcomes not found in any other type of American higher education institution.” They, and especially the more selective among them, have long been remarkably successful, moreover, in the number of students they send on to Ph.D. graduate programs. And, having been disproportionately and persistently successful in attracting students interested in the natural sciences and in graduating science majors, they turn out to have been about “twice as productive as the average institution in training” those who go on to Ph.D.s in the sciences. Further than that, and taking into account those scientific racehorses who have been honored by election to membership in the National Academy of Sciences, it would appear that liberal arts college graduates not only go on to obtain Ph.D.s but also go on to excel in their fields of research at a rate at least two times greater than bachelor’s degree recipients in general.”<sup>11</sup>

We should not forget, of course, that while some of these very positive attributes, achievements, and outcomes speak to the strengths of the full range of liberal arts colleges, others speak to the particular strengths of one or another subset. A few years ago, for example, a study of institutional “research” and “student orientation” undertaken by Alexander W. Astin and Mitchell J. Chang, and involving a balanced sample of approximately 200 universities and colleges of all levels of selectivity, found that of the 10 institutions that fell both into the top 10 percent in research orientation and the bottom 10 percent in student orientation, all, not surprisingly, were research universities—most of them very large, public institutions. But they also found that of the eight institutions that were in the bottom 10 percent in research orientation but the top 10 percent in student orientation, all were non-selective residential liberal arts colleges in the Carnegie Liberal Arts II Classification. On the matter of orientation to student needs, it turns out, these colleges shine with a somewhat brighter light than do their more favored and highly selective brethren in the Liberal Arts I group.<sup>12</sup>



Some comparable differences show up when one turns to matters pertaining to the faculties of liberal arts colleges—to their teaching commitment, research productivity, overall morale, attitude towards their chosen profession, and so on. So far, at least, as attitudes and morale go, the liberal arts college sector seems to have ridden out the demographic and cultural turbulence of the past several decades in somewhat better shape than the others. Certainly, the data from the 1989 Carnegie faculty survey reveal it to be the institutional sector with the highest degree of overall agreement on the standards for good scholarship and the highest degree of commitment to the importance of institutional service, student advising, and the delivery, evaluation, and rewarding of effective teaching. Not surprisingly, and despite receiving on average comparatively poorer salaries, faculty who teach in this collegiate sector are prominent among those who are at the highest end of the institutional loyalty and commitment scale, who feel “least trapped in a profession with limited opportunity for advancement,” and who accordingly evince “the greatest enthusiasm for their work.”<sup>13</sup>

All of this is doubtless true, but the first thing that a tighter focus on the sector reveals is that the overall impression of comparative well-being calls here, as with the matter of student orientation, for a measure of qualification or, at least, complexification. Faculty at liberal arts colleges may indeed evince the greatest enthusiasm about their work, but the precise *nature* of that work clearly differs somewhat at different points across the liberal arts college spectrum. When, more than a quarter of a century ago, Martin Trow and Oliver Fulton analyzed the data generated by the Carnegie faculty survey of 1969 with a view to finding out how research activity was distributed across the various institutional sectors of the higher educational system, they discovered that, while there was indeed something of a divide between the so-called research and teaching institutions, it lay not between the universities with a substantial commitment to graduate education on the one hand and, on the other, the four- and two-year colleges. Instead, it lay between the universities and top-tier of four-year colleges, on the one hand, and the less highly selective four- and two-year colleges

on the other. In this as on other matters, they noted, a veritable “fault-line” runs between what they called the “high quality” colleges showing “levels of research activity . . . that in sheer rate of publication are close to those [prevailing] at the lesser universities”<sup>14</sup> and the rest of the four- and two-year college sector.

A similar fault-line, though one running this time right through the center of the Liberal Arts I group, showed up later on in two studies of rather different type, one conducted by Robert McCaughey, the other by Astin and Chang, with a significant percentage of the humanities and social sciences faculty at the leading 30-40 colleges publishing at rates comparable to the faculties at some of the Ivy League universities,<sup>15</sup> and with the top 11 institutions that ranked pretty highly on *both* research and student orientation all turning out to be private, highly selective colleges from the Liberal Arts I sector.<sup>16</sup> Beyond that, moreover, there seems to be at such colleges something of an interactive or symbiotic relationship between scholarship and teaching with, if Kenneth P. Ruscio is correct, what Ernest Boyer was later to call “integrative scholarship” having already established a distinguishing presence among their faculties. That is to say, a type of scholarship less tightly disciplinary in its focus, more broadly interpretative in its aspirations, more consciously linked to classroom needs, more accessible to student understanding and even, in some of its dimensions, to student involvement.<sup>17</sup> And everything I know or sense suggests that on this matter Ruscio is absolutely correct.

There is really something quite splendid about all of this, something of great value, something worthy of celebration and pride. But something also that is dependent on the achievement and maintenance at these very special institutions of a very particular and almost certainly quite fragile balance. If that particular balance does not exist across the full spectrum of institutions of higher education, neither has it always existed even in the more privileged reaches of the liberal arts college sector. And its persistence on into the future is certainly not something that our faculty and administrative leadership can simply assume. Let me conclude,

then, by signaling some concerns about that future, all three of them, it turns out, pertaining to the life of the faculty and their role at the college.

First, a really very simple point pertaining to faculty-faculty relationships. Many of the good things that small residential collegiate communities have in the past made possible for their faculties—not least among them the enviable ease of intellectual collaboration and exchange with colleagues in a broad array of disciplines and with a stimulating variety of interests—depends on the faculty *knowing* each other, and knowing each other across departmental, divisional, and generational lines. And that simple fact is no longer something that one can take for granted. A few years ago, writing about changes over the past three decades in social life within our research universities, Lynn Hunt pointed out the marked degree to which “socializing and social life in general have almost disappeared in favor of official functions and much more informal interaction”—but “generally,” she suspected “simply less interaction.”<sup>18</sup> And she went on to emphasize the price paid in the life of the university for the concomitant weakening of “social bonding” on campus. While that shift has not occurred in quite the same degree on our small college campuses, it had certainly begun to occur a quarter of a century ago when I was dean of the faculty at Williams College, and it was already calling for conscious efforts on the part of administrators to compensate for the demise under changed conditions of the older social mechanisms that had traditionally served to stitch the collegiate community together across disciplinary and generational lines. The passage of time has done nothing at all to diminish the need for such conscious efforts. If anything, indeed, it has intensified that need.

Second, a matter concerning faculty-student relations. Here I worry about the continued willingness of enough faculty, despite the countervailing demands imposed by the need to juggle more complicated personal and professional lives, to maintain a presence beyond the classroom in the cocurricular and residential life of the campus. Students of the current generation strike me as having had somewhat less of a shaping adult presence in their pre-collegiate

lives than any I can remember in 40 and more years of teaching and administration.<sup>19</sup> And, after a quarter of a century's interval during which the persistent tendency was to distance themselves from adult involvement in their cocurricular lives, they have come once more to signal (and in ways no less compelling for being not infrequently self-absorbed) their wish for an enhanced measure of adult guidance or, at least, presence. If the powerfully formative impact of a liberal education pursued in a diverse and challenging residential setting is to be maximized, we must somehow find the means to ensure that that guiding adult presence in their college years continues in the future to be as available to our students as it has been in the past.

Third, an even more fundamental (if, perhaps, somewhat more opaque) point pertaining to faculty-institutional relations. Universities and colleges, I would submit, are to a wholly unusual degree complexly multiple entities. Given the concomitant tug and pull of different internal forces cultural, disciplinary, bureaucratic, professional, or the pressures generated by multiple, various, and sometimes clashing constituencies (students, parents, alumni, donors, faculty, staff, and this last is a growing and increasingly professionalized group with its own multiple and sometimes quite conflicting understandings of the collegiate mission)—it is distressingly easy for the institutional signal to drift off its crucial and fundamental academic frequency. Or, at least, it is all too easy for that signal to be distorted by the static that a distracting multiplicity of nonacademic and nonintellectual collegiate activities, preoccupations, and commitments inevitably generates. And the 2003 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation report on the changing impact of athletics on the intellectual and academic vibrancy even of our collegiate campuses constitutes an unexpected, sobering, and bracing reminder of that fact.<sup>20</sup>

The presence of a strong, clear, and consistent presidential voice is, of course, vital to keeping the institutional signal tuned in tightly to its central academic frequency. But in the discharge of this most important of responsibilities, and perhaps now more than ever, the president, who stands at the intersection of so many competing

pressures and constituent voices, deserves encouragement and support. After all, equally important to the maintenance of a clear focus on the institution's central academic mission, all other burdens notwithstanding, is a continuation on into the future of the type of devoted concern that the faculties of our colleges have traditionally evinced for the well-being not simply of their own departments and programs, but also of the college as a whole. For colleges are a good deal more than mere collections of divisions, departments, and programs. I worry again, I must confess, that the continuation on into the future of that fine tradition of generous institutional engagement is no longer something that we can just take for granted or assume to be an integral part of the very nature of collegiate life. But it is altogether too important simply to let go by default. It is imperative that we, faculty and administrators alike, do whatever we can to preserve it. It is something of value, something quite precious, something truly rewarding for those involved (though they won't always know it at the time), and something, certainly, altogether essential to the ultimate well-being of these wonderful and very special institutions whose current status and future prospects we have assembled here to discuss.

### Notes

1. *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1994) x, 25-36.
2. Quoted in Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Knopf, 1962) 68, 443.
3. Francis Oakley, *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (New York, UP, 1992), 26-27.

4. *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, x. The precise figure given is 3,595, with 637 of them listed as liberal arts colleges.
5. Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 78.
6. Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 78.
7. David W. Breneman, "Are We Losing Our Liberal Arts Colleges?" *College Board Review* 156 (Summer 1990): 16-21, 29; David W. Breneman, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), esp. ch. 1, 1-19, and appendix A, 138-61. Cf. Michael Delucchi, "Liberal Arts' Colleges and the Myth of Uniqueness," *Journal of Higher Education* 68.4 (1997): 414-26.
8. Hugh Hawkins, "The Making of the Liberal Arts College Identity," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999), 15-16, 21.
9. Joan Gilbert, "The Liberal Arts College—Is It Really An Endangered Species?" *Change* (September-October 1995): 41-42.
10. Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, "The Future Economic Challenges for the Liberal Arts Colleges," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 47-75.
11. See in general the essays gathered together in *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts College*, *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999). See especially (and in order of citation), Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, "The Future Economic Challenges for the Liberal Arts Colleges," 47-75; Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students," 77-100 (at 83, 77); Susan C. Bourque, "Reassessing Research: Liberal Arts Colleges and the Social Sciences," 265-72 (noting at 265 that "with [the 1998] data weighted for size of institution," eight of the leading 10 institutions producing people who go on to Ph.D.s in the social sciences are liberal arts colleges); Thomas R. Cech, "Science at Liberal Arts Colleges: A Better Education?" 195-216. See also Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 91-93; Alexander W. Astin and Mitchell J. Chang, "Colleges That Emphasize Research and Teaching: Can You Have Your Cake and Eat It Too?" *Change* 27.5 (September/October 1995): 45-49.
12. Astin and Chang, "Colleges That Emphasize Research and Teaching," 46.
13. Francis Oakley, "The Elusive Academic Profession: Complexity and Change," *Daedalus* 126.4 (1997): 56.

14. Martin Trow and Oliver Fulton, "Research Activity in American Higher Education," *Teachers and Students: Aspects of American Higher Education*, ed. Martin Trow (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975) 49 and nn. 13, 74, 79.
15. Robert A. McCaughey, *Scholars and Teachers: The Faculties of Select Liberal Arts Colleges and Their Place in American Higher Learning* (New York: Barnard College, 1995), esp. ix, 41-46, 92-93, 103-05.
16. Astin and Chang, "Colleges That Emphasize Research and Teaching," 45-49.
17. Kenneth P. Ruscio, "The Distinctive Scholarship of the Selective Liberal Arts College," *Journal of Higher Education* 58.2 (1987): 205-22. Cf. Oakley, *Community of Learning*, 152-57, and Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).
18. Lynn Hunt, "Democratization and Decline? The Consequences of Demographic Change in the Humanities," *What's Happened to the Humanities?* ed. Alvin Kernan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997) 26.
19. Cf. Richard H. Hersh, "Generating Ideals and Transforming Lives: A Contemporary Case for the Residential Liberal Arts College," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 173-94, esp. 178 where, quoting Arthur Levine to the effect that "students are coming to college overwhelmed and more damaged than those of previous years," he adds: "[...] the generation now entering college has experienced few authentic connections with adults. This is the manifestation of what I call a 'culture of neglect.'"
20. William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003).

## I. THE PAST

### THE LIBERAL ARTS MISSION IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT



## Balancing Hopes and Limits in the Liberal Arts College<sup>1</sup>

*Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz*

I begin my task of exploring the historical context of the liberal arts college with the thoughts of W. E. B. DuBois, the great African American sociologist, educator, and political leader.<sup>2</sup> One hundred years ago he published *The Souls of Black Folk*, a revelatory book that continues to inform us about American life, the ways that race and ethnicity shape consciousness and personal struggle. It also tells us a great deal about education and the dream of the educated person in DuBois's era, and therefore helps us focus on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in our own time.

W. E. B. DuBois articulated the notion of the Talented Tenth. As he imagined his race struggling for civil and political rights, he turned to education and higher education. The Talented Tenth of educated black leaders was for him the saving remnant, the yeast, the impelling force that would bring change. He dreamed of self-conscious manhood, the ability to be black and an adult in America. He never argued for full black assimilation into white society, for he valued the "two-ness" that allowed the "gift of second sight," the ability to see, analyze, criticize, and change American society. What he wanted was to develop a corps of black artists and savants to lead the way for their brethren out of segregation and white denial of black personhood. Through a full liberal arts education, black students would enter into their world heritage, see clearly, confront the discrimination that bound them into a secondary place, and win their full civil and political rights.

In his book and in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, DuBois pitted himself against the prevailing African American leader of his time, Booker T. Washington. A realist, where DuBois was a visionary, Washington argued for vocational education as the path to black progress. He stressed the bourgeois values of cleanliness and good order, or, as he put it, “the gospel of the toothbrush.” He emphasized the development of habits of work and vocational skills. As blacks learned to be good brickmakers in his school, the white society around them would come to rely on their proficiency and hard work. Whites and blacks would be bound together like the fingers of one hand: separate in their social and personal lives, together in building the economy. Through this process, blacks would gain respect and would gradually win their rights.

This debate between W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington has continued to reverberate in American society. It is usually seen as a political conflict within the black community, assertion versus accommodation. I want us to understand it also as part of an ongoing debate about education and the goals of an educated person, a critical debate both within the United States and abroad. Both men were involved as educators. DuBois taught at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Washington was the president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. When either man spoke, he expressed and reflected contemporary arguments about the liberal arts and vocationalism in higher education.

Although their words reflected issues of their era 100 years ago, the struggle between the liberal arts and vocationalism has been an ongoing one, spanning much of the history of American higher education, and it continues today, albeit in different forms. It began in the early 19th century at a time when the newer colleges were offering engineering programs, threatening the older ones with obsolescence. It surged at the turn of the 20th century, when the university seemed in ascendance. In terms of numbers, Washington, the advocate of vocational training, was on the winning side of the argument. By 1910, only a third of the national student body in higher education studied the traditional liberal arts

curriculum; two-thirds were in courses geared to vocations such as engineering or accounting. Liberal arts study, however, was restating its goals and in the early 20th century was redefining the educated person.

In considering this debate and the goals of a liberal arts education, it is important to recover DuBois as a voice speaking not only to and for African Americans but also to and for a wider world. DuBois is important, for advocacy for the liberal arts can be seen as elitist. This seems all the more true today, a time when only four percent of all American graduates get their degrees from residential liberal arts colleges. Moreover, there are historical grounds for this, for the institution that is the prime bearer of the liberal arts tradition, the liberal arts college, has had a discriminatory past. Until the last three decades, the overt and covert actions of liberal arts colleges discriminated against or barred African Americans from attendance or full participation. In addition, women were long kept from studying the liberal arts in a collegiate setting. Liberal arts colleges limited the numbers of Catholics and Jews admitted in the first half of the 20th century.

In this discussion, I do not want to dwell on the aspect of restriction, but rather to look at its mirror opposite. For each group of students historically precluded from full access to liberal arts colleges, there was a hope that tells us a great deal about the promises of liberal arts education. To women, the liberal arts offered full entrance into the culture. As a group (undifferentiated by their real situations in life) they had long had half a loaf—in early New England, for example, they could listen to the sermon and take it down, but they could not give the sermon. Study of arts, sciences, and letters made the entire loaf theirs. Framed in somewhat different language, this was true for non-Protestants, African Americans, and immigrants from abroad. Because these excluded groups both valued and had been deprived of the liberal arts, access to these disciplines promised to open the way to an enriched life of the mind and spirit.

DuBois helps us understand as well that there was always another element. For women, Catholics and Jews, blacks, and immigrants

(and in the case of women, these categories are often overlapping), liberal arts training had a second goal. All understood that college education was the necessary prerequisite to entry into the professions. For those in America hoping to rise in the world or live independently with decency and respect, earning their bread in white collar occupations, the professions beckoned. DuBois's educated black vanguard was to teach and write, heal and advocate, as its members recreated the African American community and restored rights. The preprofessional aspect of the liberal arts should never be lost from our sight.

At some level, training for the professions had been the case from the outset. Harvard University, founded in 1636, was intended, after all, for the education of a learned ministry. While this meant that a student was to receive the distillation of culture in a curriculum, at one level it involved training for what was then the society's most important learned profession.

By 1800, two percent of available young men went to college. Their ages ranged from their early teens to thirties. The youngest were sons of Southern landed and Northern mercantile wealth. To them were joined the somewhat older sons of small urban professional elite—ministers, physicians, lawyers—eager to gain professional skills and positions comparable to their fathers'. The oldest were lads from farms who were studying for the ministry.

What was the education that the 19th-century colleges offered? First of all, it must be said that among the schools there was a good deal of variety, for many of what Americans called colleges were struggling small denominational schools. In some places, there were challenges to the curriculum, as engineering and science suggested newer, useful approaches. At its best, the core of formal study began with its medieval base: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, logic, grammar, and rhetoric. To this it added the "New Learning" of mathematics and natural sciences. English instruction in the sciences broke the hold of Latin. The study of language shifted to include literature, history, and rhetoric. Moral philosophy emerged as the capstone of the curriculum, taught by the president to the senior class. Moral philosophy sought to

develop a guide to human behavior based not on divine law, but on the exploration—through observation and reason—of the social order as revealed by man. In addition, students’ debating societies, with their important libraries of literature, history, and oratory, supplemented the formal curriculum and added to the skills needed by citizens and men of affairs. In 1828, Yale College set the intellectual rationale for the liberal arts college. Faced with Union College’s decision to adopt an engineering program, one of the first challenges to the liberal arts, Yale issued a report that reasserted the value of the more traditional approach to learning. “Intellectual culture,” it asserted, required the “discipline and the furniture of the mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge.” The goal of college was rounded intellectual development and ultimately self-direction.

Oddly enough, despite many new opportunities and government support precipitated by the Morrill Act of 1862, the proportion of young people seeking college in the United States remained relatively constant at two percent until the end of the 19th century. How can we explain this lack of growth in the proportion of young people seeking college? The best explanation is that for much of the period, there was little interest in the United States in formal credentials; youth could learn occupations in a number of ways and often their best start was an early one.

But change was in the offing. Industrial activity grew, expanding its base and reach. At the turn of the century, a plethora of professions established standards. In the place of the older, provincial middle class of small-town bankers and lawyers came a new more urban and cosmopolitan middle class composed of young professionals. The university became the important site for training. Laurence R. Veysey’s *The Emergence of the American University* demonstrates that, at its creation, the university drew on German approaches and valued experimental, empirical methods of knowledge. It introduced the lecture and seminar to take the place of the recitation, in which undergraduates gave information back to the instructor that they had learned by memorization. The university valued graduate school training above all, with the Ph.D. disserta-

tion requiring that its students become creators of new knowledge, preferably by experimental methods.

Professional organizations, flexing their new muscles, established criteria for certification. In addition to the traditional professions of the ministry, law, and medicine, emerged newer ones: education, journalism, engineering, scientific agriculture, pharmacy. Some of the newer fields offered opportunity to women in fields like nursing, education, and social work. As professions set new standards, institutions of higher education had to become accredited, and graduates had to pass licensing examinations. Schools such as those of medicine and law began to require a bachelor's degree in arts or sciences for entrance. The need for credentials led to a rise in graduate training. In 1920, 20 percent of Yale undergraduates stated that they planned to go to graduate school.

Supporting the top was expansion at the bottom, the growth in elementary and secondary school systems. With this, the numbers in higher education began to rise. By 1900, the proportion of young people seeking college in the United States was at four percent; by 1920, eight percent. By 1940, the proportion had grown to 16 percent. But there was an important change. Once, young people entering business sought to start as soon as possible and work their way up; by the 1920s, business management began to seek college youth. College was seen by young people as the place to acquire connections, learn how to lead, garner style. This helps to explain why two-thirds of the student body in 1910 were in vocational courses of study.

But what about the one-third who remained in the classical course of study? What about the liberal arts? What about the vision of the Talented Tenth and the dream of the educated person that inspired W. E. B. DuBois and others of his generation? In the wake of the enthusiasm that Veysey's book created for the history of the university, all sorts of wrong notions developed about the liberal arts college. Newer scholarship fortunately allows us to see the particular role that the liberal arts college carved for itself.

Alongside the rising university, the liberal arts college reasserted itself and redefined its mission. While the Yale Report of 1828 remained the bedrock of the liberal arts tradition, new emphases were added, inspired by the changing educational scene and more complex society and culture. Adding onto notions of the “furniture and discipline of the mind” and the continuing religious thrust of many colleges, was a new assertion. The college’s purpose was to build “character” and train “leaders.” While the newer curriculum in science, technology, and professional training might be important to a career, the liberal arts of the college was important to life.

The university brought a change in pedagogy that accompanied the shift from deductive to inductive reasoning and empirical methods of learning. The early college had largely used the recitation for a closed reciting of known facts. The university offered the lecture to serve as a demonstration of the open scientific method. As colleges adapted this new form and professors learned to use empirical approaches in the small-class setting, they kept the lecture informal and open to questions and discussion. Liberal arts colleges began to argue for the smaller institutional setting that allowed for fuller class discussion, more student writing, and the evaluation of papers and essays by professors, not graduate students. The renewed argument for the small scale of the liberal arts classroom drew on earlier notions of the engagement of the professor grappling with students that lay at the heart of the enterprise: we began to hear again about the legendary Mark Hopkins of Williams College sitting at one end of the log, with the student at the other.

As liberal arts colleges adapted the new learning to their relatively small size and more limited facilities, they focused on what they could do well. They offered the basic subjects in the range of liberal arts fields, sciences as well as humanities. A number of colleges placed a distinctive emphasis on literature, history, philosophy, and religion. Although younger members of the faculty began to apply the new tools of scholarship in these fields, they joined an older faculty who often saw the central task of teaching as the exploration of texts for moral and ethical meaning rather than scientific inquiry.

They saw their charge as developing the whole person. Moral Philosophy, once the capstone college course, came to represent the goal of the entire enterprise: the development of the “whole person,” who learned in college the standards necessary for guidance throughout life.

Pedagogical and curricular change, however, brought new insight and energies. When Wellesley College opened in 1875 it had one of the first scientific laboratories in the country. Vassar College pioneered the “new history”—in your back yard, using trash—not in the 1960s, but in the 1890s. Between 1892 and 1894 Smith College mounted a full program in the sociological problems of modern America, including courses in labor issues, socialism, criminal reform, crime prevention, and organized philanthropy. The liberal arts goal for the educated person encompassed an understanding of the demands of the emerging world.

As it responded to the university, the liberal arts college positioned itself within the modern world and defined a new utility. Many middle-class occupations demanded the ability to read, write, and think analytically. The college was well prepared to meet this demand and to argue that it could accomplish it best through its rigorous program of study that offered students grounding in the fundamentals and a limited range of wider, more worldly, choices. Advanced professional training might well be necessary for many careers, but it was to be gained only after the four-year course. One could study law, medicine, library science, the scholarly disciplines in graduate programs after leaving the hallowed halls of ivy. Many colleges actually accommodated a fair number of vocational courses, such as accounting, education, or graphic design, though they de-emphasized them in their rhetoric.

In their emphasis on the whole person, colleges made room to include the physical person. They gave a unique importance to athletics, but insisted that it keep its amateur quality and be approached as part of the careful development of the whole man or woman. Colleges came to value the extracurriculum and emphasized its opportunities for fellowship and leadership.



But ultimately at the heart of the college was the belief that at the core of the transmission of knowledge lay the personal relation of teacher and student. A human being can take a subject that in the text seems dry and unabsorbing and dramatize the material to make it come alive. In areas that require a student to grapple with moral or ethical questions, direct interaction with a person who has confronted these issues is vital to real understanding. For young people and those returning in middle years there is the value of seeing a good mind at work: much of effective college teaching involves spontaneous interplay between professor, materials, and students in the class. Those exciting connections when students see something for the very first time—the “ah ha!” moments—spring from the magic of the human presence.

As I close, I want to return to the notion of the Talented Tenth, and the promise that liberal arts education offers; for at education’s heart is an exquisite irony. At its most profound, the study of the liberal arts opens up to the next generation the cultural world, offering to students the tools and the sources to imagine life at its fullest and deepest. It teaches students the languages to penetrate the most profound mysteries of the natural and social world: literature, mathematics, the natural sciences, and the arts. In the college classroom, undergraduates inherit the collective wisdom and culture of our universe. But colleges also offer students the means to understand human society in all its limitations. Through the social sciences—economics, political science, anthropology, and the sociology that DuBois taught—young people learn about the ways in which they are bound, defined, and tabulated.

Educators have a profoundly moral task. We need to assist our students in gaining the intellectual resources they need to balance the hopes with the limits. I wonder if today, unlike in DuBois’s era, we often err by emphasizing the limits. Years ago, at my instigation, students at the small women’s college where I was teaching voted for a women’s historian to be their commencement speaker. Her talk was the best such address I have ever heard, so unlike the pap that the members of the news media or Congress generally dole out, but the students could hardly bring themselves to polite applause.

The speaker had warned them of the traps of “superwoman”—the admonition to young women “to do it all” when the world withholds the necessary political and institutional changes to support female emancipation. When one of the graduating seniors belted out a song she had written letting her classmates know that “you can be any thing you want to be,” the class rose spontaneously to cheer her. I was appalled. Now, two decades later, I realize that these students were at least partly right. As we teach young people in our liberal arts classrooms today and remind them of the limits they will face, we need to reaffirm their belief in their own powers.

Facing the obstacles of American society, DuBois was hardly naive. Perhaps it is time to reawaken some of his early hopes for liberal arts education.

### Notes

1. This paper is based on my own research in higher education in the United States, particularly as written about in *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984), *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1987), and *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas*, (New York: Knopf, 1994). In addition, I have drawn on important works on higher education that include Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965); Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979); and Hugh Hawkins, “The Making of the Liberal Arts College Identity,” *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 1-25. Information on Smith College was obtained with the assistance of Nanci Young, Smith College Archivist.

2. For W. E. B. DuBois, see David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993). *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* was first published in 1903.

## The Problem of Mission: A Brief Survey of the Changing Mission of the Liberal Arts

*Christina Elliott Sorum*

In examining the mission of a liberal arts education, it becomes clear that the topics of current debate have ancient roots. Any of you who have ever been involved in writing or reviewing a mission statement will agree with Aristotle's comment in the *Politics*:

It is clear then that there should be legislation about education and that it should be conducted on a public system. But consideration must be given to the question of what constitutes education and what is the proper way to be educated. At present there are differences of opinion as to the proper tasks to be set; for all people do not agree as to the things that the young ought to learn, either with a view to virtue or a view to the best life, nor is it clear whether their studies should be regulated more with regard to intellect or with regard to character. And confusing questions arise out of the education that actually prevails, and it's not at all clear whether the pupils should practice pursuits that are practically useful, or morally edifying, or higher accomplishments—for all these views have won the support of some judges; and nothing is agreed as regards the exercise conducive to virtue, for, to start, all men do not honor the same virtue, so that they naturally hold different opinions in regard to training in virtue.<sup>1</sup>

For the purpose of comparison, let me present a list of questions that came up in the review of Union College's mission statement as the faculty prepared for our Middle State Accreditation review four years ago:

Is our role to teach critical thinking skills or to imbue students with the wisdom and traditions that have shaped their culture? Or is it to open student minds to an ever changing world and to train them to cope with constantly expanding fields of knowledge? Or is it to train individuals in English or political science or biology and get them into medical or law school? Does or should a liberal arts education have an overt civic purpose? Should or can we teach values in our diverse world?

We are all aware of the fragile condition of the liberal arts today and of the decline in the number of degrees during the past century. The statistics that Louis Menand reported in 2001 in his article "College: The End of the Golden Age" are worrisome. Nationally, 20 percent of B.A.s are in business, 10 percent in education, and seven percent in the health professions. Furthermore, in 1970, English majors were 7.6 percent of B.A.s, but by 1997 they were only 4.2 percent, while mathematics majors dropped from three percent in 1970 to one percent in 1997. Both disciplines had drops in absolute numbers as well as in percentages. Only psychology and biology produce more B.A.s than 25 years ago. Even at Harvard University, Yale University, and the University of Chicago, only half of the bachelor's degrees are in liberal arts (natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities).<sup>2</sup>

These statistics, Union's questions, and Aristotle's comments all point to a central problem for the liberal arts today, namely our mission. It seems to me that our mission—why we teach what we teach—is muddled, especially with regard to the questions of whether we should or can teach values and of why the liberal arts are relevant beyond the teaching of skills. Furthermore, it seems to me that this muddled message, avoidable or not, is central to the

declining interest in the liberal arts. I would like to offer a quick review of the historical development of the mission of the liberal arts from Protagoras to Charles Eliot with the hope that it will help us to understand the contemporary situation.

Throughout Greek antiquity, the job of education—called *paideia*—was the transmission and acquisition of *arête*, “excellence.” In the earliest period, *arête* generally meant the excellence of an athlete or warrior, but over time it included all the desirable qualities, including the intellectual and moral. Originally this excellence was transmitted by retelling the stories of Homer and of later poets including Theognis and Sophocles. The underlying theory was that the virtue of leaders and good men was first inherited and subsequently developed through imitation of examples—a premise that was appropriate to the mostly aristocratic forms of government.

Once more democratic forms of government replaced the aristocracy and there could no longer be the assurance that leaders inherited virtue in their blood, an education that could provide political leaders became a necessity. The sophists entered the scene, these Greek itinerant teachers, such as Gorgias, Hippias, and Antiphon, who in the fifth century B.C.E. went from city to city pedaling their wisdom. They no longer relied upon narrative exempla to speak for themselves, but taught models of argument, the origin and structure of language, and oratory, skills necessary if a man was to lead in the assembly. Werner Jaeger, in his great book *Paideia*, calls these men “the inventors of intellectual culture and the art of education that aims at producing it,” in other words, the inventors of a liberal arts education.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, these early sophists eschewed dealing with the problems of man’s moral world. In other words, the education they offered was highly practical and closely connected to political and material success; it was, in fact, preprofessional although its content was firmly located in the humanities.

Aristophanes makes sport of these sophists in the *Clouds* by contrasting their ideas to the older form of education, the goal of

which was to teach moral virtue. He stages a debate between Right Argument and Wrong Argument on the teaching of rhetoric, grammar, and allied topics. Right Argument represents the older generation's ideals, a presophistic education that focuses on music and poetry and instills reverence for traditional religion and the state. Wrong Argument throws out entirely the traditional content and the moral and civic function of education and insists that students should learn clever argument by which they can exploit traditional beliefs and standards and win their cases. A crucial question emerges through the nonsense. Is the mission of an education to instill moral virtues and traditional values or to teach "value free" skills by which we can manipulate ideas and arguments in service of our goals regardless of their virtue?

Protagoras, born c. 485 B.C.E., was a sophist but one who tried to wed the two approaches. He declared that, through the education he provided, he taught not only the skills of a sophist but also the moral qualities necessary for good citizens. In Plato's *Protagoras*, Protagoras tells the story of Prometheus who gave the first men fire and the various skills it implies, but he adds that these people lived in scattered groups and as a result wild animals devoured them. Consequently, they gathered together in cities for protection, but their absence of political skills led them to injure one another, so that they scattered again, and again they were devoured. At this point Zeus stepped in to save the human race. He sent Hermes to give men the qualities they needed to live together—respect for others and a sense of justice. Protagoras explains that, although these god-given qualities are innate, they must be developed by teaching, by parents, in schools, and finally by the laws or the state itself. Protagoras concludes with the boast that he "rather better than anyone else" can help men acquire good and noble characters and be good citizens. He is a professor of both ethics and politics.<sup>4</sup>

Protagoras may resemble Right Argument in asserting the moral utility of his educational system, but he resembles Wrong Argument not only in teaching oratorical skills but also because he is a moral relativist. Socrates refers in the *Theatetus* to Protagoras'

comment that “man is the measure of all things.”<sup>5</sup> This statement, which at first seems an assertion of a humanistic ideal, is, in fact, a doctrine of the relativity of all knowledge or opinion to each particular person. Furthermore, Protagoras was a complete skeptic about the claims to universal validity of both religion and science.

Plato’s educational mission developed in part in response to these spreading ideas of skepticism and relativism. He had lived through the chaotic collapse of Athenian democracy and had lost faith in the power and moral authority of law—perhaps a situation not dissimilar to today’s. Consequently, as presented in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*, his education is designed to create and maintain the state through educating useful and just citizens. For the guardians (the army) and the rulers, the course of study begins with poetry and music, continues through athletic training, moves to mathematics, and then ultimately to dialectic, the use of logical argument in pursuit of truth. The elite philosopher kings who completed this process would achieve comprehension of the good, or the ultimate reality of justice, and hence be just rulers.

The importance of mission in shaping education is nowhere more obvious than in Plato’s views on poetry. Although the moral values Plato espouses are for the most part similar to those of presophistic Greek education, he attacks the very medium that transmitted those values, poetry. For centuries, poetry had been the vessel that contained all knowledge and culture. In poetry you found your history, your gods, and your heroes. Plato, however, in attempting to establish a criterion of the highest moral standards for his state, censors the poets and dramatists. If the ultimate reality—called god or the good—is perfect and unchanging, you do not want students hearing stories in which the gods have faults or are changeable or are the source of deceit and evil in the world. And if the goal of knowledge is to find this good, you want students to study those subjects that lead to an understanding of the truth. You do not want them to spend time listening to poetry or observing plays, for these are merely imperfect copies of a human reality which itself is only a copy of an ultimate reality. Not only does his argument illustrate graphically the political agenda of his educa-

tional system, but it also provides an early example of the debate over the function of the great books in the curriculum.

In Plato's works, the ultimate goal of a liberal arts education is to produce leaders for the state. The connection between education and the "real world"—if his Republic can be called the "real world"—is what informs his liberal arts. Aristotle, my next great educational theorist, also subordinates all other associations to the state, and cannot conceive of education that is not a concern of the state.<sup>6</sup> He, however, has his own particular emphasis, which is to refine the distinction between arts that are liberal or free and those that are not. Liberal and illiberal arts and actions are not necessarily mutually exclusive but are judged liberal or illiberal according to their end. If someone learns or does anything for his or her own sake or for the sake of friends or with a view to excellence, it is liberal, but if it is done for other ends, the action will be menial and servile. In other words, if you play music for the sake of enjoying music, it is liberal, but if you play music to earn money, it is illiberal. Thus, while he concludes in the *Ethics* that "war and politics are the noblest" of activities, they are chosen only as a means to some end beyond themselves and, therefore, they are of less worth than the exercise of reason for its own sake in the contemplation of the highest things.<sup>7</sup> This introduces the "art for art's sake" argument for the liberal arts that has so little appeal for today's students with their pragmatic expectations for their education.

Cicero, whose works had a powerful influence on the education of succeeding generations, is also concerned with educating political leaders. Like Protagoras and Plato, however, and unlike the sophists, he does not separate the study of skills from the study of values. In *De Oratore*, he outlines a liberal arts education, the *artes liberalis*, which includes the study of music, literature and poetry, natural science, ethics, and political science. Although he gives rhetoric the pride of place, he is quite clear that an orator must have a firm educational grounding, for without this, oratory is simply "an empty and ridiculous swirl of verbiage."<sup>8</sup> J. R. Woodhouse describes the product of a Ciceronian rhetorical education as



someone who combined in himself the attributes of a top civil servant, university professor, and army commander.<sup>9</sup>

The idea thus persisted during antiquity that a liberal arts education had both a moral and political mission. If we leap forward a millennium to the 12th and 13th centuries, the period in which many universities were founded, we find at least two important changes. The first change is curricular. Young men still studied the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, astronomy, mathematics, and music), but under the scholastic orientation of teachers such as Thomas Aquinas, logic and mathematics moved to the fore, replacing Plato's dialectic and Cicero's rhetoric. Furthermore, in place of ethics, philosophy, and the arts, theology assumed an ever-increasing role and eventually overshadowed all the other subjects. The second change is a matter of status. The liberal arts were no longer a complete course of study in themselves, but merely a preparatory program for the advanced study of medicine, theology, and canon and civil law. As Donald Kagan points out, the medieval liberal arts education was valued above all for its practical rewards; the study of logic, dialectic, rhetoric, and math was excellent training for the burgeoning ranks of clerks, lawyers, and priestly managers.<sup>10</sup> This relegation of the liberal arts to what today we call secondary schools has persisted in much of Europe.

With the Renaissance and the discovery of the texts of Quintilian, Cicero, and others, there came a reassertion of a more Ciceronian type of study with its humanistic ideals. The curriculum was no longer designed to provide churchmen and lawyers but was expanded to add natural sciences, Hebrew, and ancient history. Pedagogical texts extolled the virtues of the *studia humanitatis*, "studies of humanity," alongside the *studia divinitatis*. For example, Guarino Guarini from Verona (1374-1460) wrote to parents and students telling them they would become virtuous, eloquent, learned, and successful leaders in society if they immersed themselves in humanistic studies.<sup>11</sup> Although it is important to keep in mind the admonition of Robert Black that classical education for most of the population was simply learning Latin grammar, once

again the liberal arts were presented as the education for the leading elite, the preparation for a life of active engagement in the world whether as a citizen, a diplomat, or a businessman.<sup>12</sup>

I turn now to England, which is important for us because it produced the founders of our educational systems. For a long period, the purpose of the English universities had been similar to that in continental Europe, to prepare scholastic clerics and lawyers rather than secular leaders. Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*, published in 1605, had lamented the situation, saying, “First, therefore, amongst so many great foundations of colleges in Europe, I find strange that they are all dedicated to professions, and none left free to arts and sciences at large,” and charged that this led to a dearth of able men to assist the princes in causes of state.<sup>13</sup> After the Reformation, however, canon law was no longer the subject of study, while civil law was taught in the Inns of Court, not in the university. Consequently, since university education was no longer merely for churchmen and clerks, gentlemen of the landed gentry and wealthy bourgeoisie began to attend.

This change did not, however, make Oxford and Cambridge great centers of learning. Rather they were rife with drinking, gambling, and scandalous behavior. Edward Gibbon, who enrolled in Magdalen College in 1752, reported that the 14 months he spent there were the “most idle and unprofitable” of his entire life. The teachers did not teach but “supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder,” and scarcely any learning took place at all.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, to keep the students busy and to prevent them from disrupting the “social peace” with their freethinking ways, a great educational reform was instituted. In 1800 Oxford introduced public examinations as the culmination of a rigorous classical curriculum. When then attacked for the traditionalism of their curriculum, the Oxonians quickly found a moral and intellectual justification. They responded that emphasis on the classical in a liberal education both elevated the individual spirit and countered the evils of commercialism and professionalization, an argument not infrequently heard today.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the early American colleges had begun with a different sort of mission from that of their English models. Although Harvard was founded in 1636 by men educated at Oxford and Cambridge during the period of laxity, it was a very serious place with a very serious mission. As Frederick Rudolph points out, if the Puritans who came to Massachusetts were going to carry forward their founding mission, they would need a learned clergy and literate people who could become the governing elite. In 1670 a Harvard commencement speaker put it more graphically, saying, “The ruling class would have been subjected to mechanics, cobblers, and tailors; the laws would not have been made by a *senatus consulta*, nor would we have rights, honors, or magisterial ordance worthy of preservation, but plebiscites, appeals to base passions, and revolutionary rumblings, if our fathers had not founded the University.”<sup>16</sup> This strong sense of civic and moral obligation underlay the founding of the other early colleges as well.

The curriculum that was to achieve this mission was Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; logic and rhetoric; natural, mental, and moral philosophy; geography and mathematics; and, throughout, divinity or catechism. With the exception of Hebrew and divinity, it was a classical humanistic curriculum with a Ciceronian mission—training leaders and shaping character. Cicero would especially have appreciated the standard capstone course of the early half of the 18th century, a seminar on moral philosophy taught by the president of the college. Passage through this widely adopted liberal arts curriculum, with its concentration on the cultural heritage of Western civilization, identified the members of the American educated class of gentlemen and scholars, the people who became clergy, teachers, doctors, and lawyers.

Yet there was always innovation and ferment as colleges struggled to adapt a classical curriculum to the American setting. In response to turmoil among students and criticism from the Connecticut legislature, the Yale Corporation charged a committee “to inquire into the expediency of so altering the regular course of instruction in this college, as to leave out the said course of study in the *dead languages*, substituting other studies therefore,” and, instead,

requiring these languages as a condition for admission.<sup>17</sup> President Jeremiah Day and Professor James L. Kingley responded with the “Yale Report” published in two parts in 1828 and 1829, which attempted both to set forth the appropriate goals for contemporary higher education and to justify the traditional curriculum.

Day asserted that the object of a college education is to “lay the foundation of a superior education: and this is to be done, at a period of life when a substitute must be provided for parental superintendence,” and that “the two great points to be gained in intellectual culture are the discipline and the furniture of the mind: expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> He continued that a Yale education attempts to maintain “such a proportion between the different branches of literature and science, as to form in the student a proper balance of character.”<sup>19</sup> Like Cicero, he emphasized that deep learning has little purpose if man has no facility to communicate his knowledge and that rhetorical skills are meaningless in one who has nothing to communicate. In his emphasis on the need for rigorous education of the highest quality, he protested against arguments for a quicker and shallower education that seemed to some more “democratic” in that it provided a greater number with the tools necessary for social and economic mobility. As to the matter of the dead languages, Professor Kingley gave a spirited defense of studying the classics: “The mere divine, the mere lawyer, or the mere physician, however well informed he may be in his particular profession, has less chance of success, than if his early education had been of a more liberal character,” for the study of the classics “itself forms the most effectual discipline of the mental faculties.”<sup>20</sup>

The Yale Report had great influence, but it did not end the debate. For example, in his 1837 oration, “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson declaimed, “I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds.” And he insisted, “We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe.”<sup>21</sup> Thirty-two years later, Charles W. Eliot, in his 1869 inaugural address as the president of Harvard, became a leading

advocate for change as he began to institute a free elective system. Up to this time, Harvard students had taken a prescribed curriculum; after his changes, the only requirements were freshman English, a second language, and progression from introductory to advanced courses.

The traditionalists did not remain silent. In 1885 in a house in Manhattan, James McCosh, president of Princeton University, and Eliot agreed to a debate on the proper construction of a liberal education. The event, which received wide press coverage, argued the virtue of what we might call a broad core requirement versus a free elective system.<sup>22</sup> The underlying issue, just as in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, was whether education should transmit traditional knowledge or teach a set of skills, whether students should learn a corpus of established wisdom or a means of making use of the old and finding the new.<sup>23</sup>

McCosh believed in a coherent and relatively prescriptive liberal education that required language and literature, science, and philosophy, "branches which no candidate for a degree should be allowed to avoid."<sup>24</sup> He defended colleges as places where the "most perfect language, the grandest literature, the most elevated thinking of all antiquity" should be taught. Expressing his opposition in language that would have delighted Cicero, McCosh said, "I believe in a better way. I adopt the new; I retain what is good in the old. I am disappointed, I am grieved when I find another course pursued which allows, which encourages, which tempts young men in their caprice to choose easy subjects, which are not fitted to enlarge or refine the mind, to produce scholars, or to send forth the great body of students as educated gentlemen." He concluded, "But, O Liberty! What crimes and cruelties have been perpetrated in thy name."<sup>25</sup>

Eliot, on the other hand, specified the three things he thought a "university of arts and sciences" should provide its students: first, freedom of choice in studies; second, opportunity to win academic distinction in a single subject; and third, the responsibility of each individual to form his own habits and guide his own conduct.<sup>26</sup> As he had said in his inaugural address, "The University must accom-

moderate itself promptly to significant changes in the character of the people for whom it exists. The institutions of higher education . . . are always a faithful mirror in which are sharply reflected the national history and character."<sup>27</sup> His vision was a truly American education that emphasized choice, competition, individualism, and self-reliance. A liberal education was no longer defined by subject but rather by a certain spirit of intellectual inquiry.

Eliot has largely triumphed. Inherent in his vision were the ideas of specialization, which—in the form of majors and preprofessional education—have infused today not only universities but also liberal arts colleges. In the name of depth and in recognition of our own disciplinary professionalism, we have made the major the center of a college education, a kind of professional training at the undergraduate level. McCosh's idea of a broad liberal arts education has been relegated to minimal general education requirements or narrowly defined core curricula. We have also largely abandoned the goal—in fact, questioned the propriety—of shaping character even in the benign form of a capstone seminar on moral philosophy or ethics. The 20th century separation of fact and value in higher education, hinted at centuries before by the Sophists and Aristophanes, was, as Julie Reuben writes, an unintended result of Eliot's reforms.<sup>28</sup>

Even a very brief review of the historical origins of the mission of the liberal arts is worthwhile, I think, not only because it reveals the unchanging elements of the debate, but also because it can help us address issues from which we shy away—the intrinsic ethical and political mission of liberal education. A part of me, and probably of each of you, would like simply to assert, as Cardinal John Henry Newman did in 1852, "That alone is liberal knowledge which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be informed (as it is called) by any end."<sup>29</sup> We know, however, that the contemporary audience, our students and their families, do not regard this as a sufficient justification for the study of the liberal arts. Nor should we use the ethnic and cultural diversity of our country, the explosion of knowledge overall and in each of our fields, our consumer culture,

the perceived lack of connection in our students' eyes between a liberal arts education and success, or even our own sense of marginalization from the "real world," as reasons to avoid professing the ethical and civic utility of the liberal arts. It is no longer clear to our students—I fear, in part, because it is not clear to us—that the liberal arts prepare us to be better persons and better citizens and leaders in today's world.

### Notes

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9. J. R. Woodhouse, *Baldesar Castiglione: A Reassessment of The Courtier* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 1978) 40.
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11. Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Learning and Literacy, 1300-1600* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 119.
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18. For discussions of the debates and the Yale Report, see Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977) 65-75, and Lucas, *American Higher Education*, 131-34.
19. *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 7-8.
20. *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 36-37.
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22. Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 194.
23. For further discussion, see Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, 22-23.
24. James McCosh, *The New Departure in College Education, Being a Reply to President Eliot's Defense of It in New York, Feb. 24, 1885* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885) 18.
25. McCosh, *The New Departure in College Education*, 4.
26. Charles William Eliot, "Liberty in Education," *Educational Reform: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1898) 125.
27. Eliot quoted in Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 7.
28. Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 4. See also Stanley Fish, "All in the Game," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 16, 2003: C5, against "educating for citizenship."
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## Response

*Stephen Fix*

One of the many things we have learned from Christina Sorum's and Helen Horowitz's interesting and illuminating papers is this: we've been at this for a long time—at the business of trying to define what higher education should be, what its role and mandate are in developing the individual student and in forming the larger society.

What is striking to me, in the accounts that Sorum and Horowitz have given, is the continuity of the arguments over time—the ways in which, at different historical moments, the controversies get framed in similar terms. Though they are shaped by the particular circumstances and social needs of their times, the debates between Plato and Aristotle, between Eliot and McCosh, between Du Bois and Washington, all keep engaging fundamentally the same issues: breadth versus specialization, moral ambitions versus practical results, the preparation of individuals for a rewarding life of aesthetic and philosophical reflection versus an emphasis on training that individual for particular roles in society.

In their rhetoric and practices, liberal arts colleges have more or less aligned themselves with one side of the argument: emphasizing the development of the whole person, with general and generalizable critical skills, rather than training that individual in specific preprofessional fields. The liberal arts claim is that the broadly educated person will be at least as capable—and maybe more

capable—of adapting later to the particular needs of the professions and of public life, than would a person more narrowly trained, at an early age, in specific subjects.

But liberal arts colleges cannot be too proprietary or self-congratulatory about all this: to some extent, the great universities can—and do—make the same claims, and share many of those same educational assumptions. What is distinctive about most liberal arts colleges is the singularity with which they embrace this mission, and, of course, their pedagogical organization: the *way* they seek to instill and develop knowledge.

Let me assert a distinction that is, at best, grossly oversimplified, but perhaps still useful: At a university, a student's responsibility is to a body of knowledge—knowledge that is often communicated through lectures that students are free or not to attend, knowledge that is tested and evaluated by people who often know little more about the student than his or her Social Security number.

Liberal arts colleges see knowledge less as a product than as a process. The creation, communication, and evaluation of knowledge emerges from a dialogue, a conversation, between faculty and students participating in an intimately scaled, highly personalized educational community, and where participation in conversations about the material—"Why, John, weren't you in our seminar today?"—is as highly prized as the actual mastery of the material. The focus is less on a body of knowledge, and more on the student who is seeking to learn that knowledge.

In such a setting, it seems easy enough to imagine that a liberal arts institution can develop in students *both* the skills they need to become useful contributors to society *and* the richly textured inner life that will make them ethically grounded, aesthetically alert, and alive to imaginative possibilities. Public and private purposes, as it were, in fruitful, harmonious relation.

It sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Maybe even worth a couple hundred thousand dollars.

So why do we find ourselves worried about the mission of liberal arts colleges? Perhaps it's just an occupational hazard, and nobly so:

We teach our students always to examine what we are doing, and why and how we are doing it. But perhaps we also fret about our mission because, in important ways, that mission seems poorly understood, or at least not well enough appreciated, by our fellow citizens. And in such circumstances, our mission itself seems under threat—a threat that some of the statistics cited by our panelists today help to quantify.

Mindful of the past controversies that Sorum and Horowitz have described, I want to reflect briefly on three of the various difficulties we face today in defining, justifying, explaining, and—forgive the phrase—selling our mission.

*First:* Perhaps more acutely than at some other historical points, and maybe because of the broad expansion and democratization of higher education since World War II, a college degree is often seen today primarily as a vehicle to economic success—for the individual, and for the society at large. For the individual, it is a relatively sure ticket to a life of financial security, as well as political and social influence.

Thus, the panicked earnestness with which parents coach their kids to compete for admission to the best colleges and universities, and their drumbeat of questions not about what majors their children will do, but what their children will do with their majors. Thus, too, the fear of not being affluent that keeps some of our most promising graduates from choosing careers as high school teachers, or ministers, or agents for non-profit organizations.

The fears and aspirations that shape the thinking of individuals and families are increasingly reinforced by the rhetoric of our political leaders, many of whom claimed their positions by invoking their own financial success as a marker of their potential as civic leaders. When the current governor of Massachusetts [Mitt Romney], a former venture capitalist, talks about higher education in this state, he defines its purpose almost exclusively in this phrase: “Workforce development.”

There is rarely even a nod toward “culture,” or moral values, or the arts. There is rarely a sense that higher education—let alone

liberal arts education—contributes powerfully to the public interest by making us more reflective and self-critical about our responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. “Workforce development”: our governor doesn’t speak for himself alone, but for very large numbers of people. And to those people, the liberal arts project must look—well—rather pure, a luxury that (in every sense) they cannot afford.

There is an irony here, one that Horowitz’s paper touches on: perhaps because of the impulse toward specialization, so much driven by technology and the explosion of knowledge in many of the professions, there is a sense in the public at large that higher education’s job is to get the process of specialized training underway early. But enlightened business leaders increasingly recognize that they will need to do the specialized professional training themselves, and would often prefer to hire someone with the adaptable skills that liberal arts colleges traditionally champion: strong writing, speaking, and quantitative abilities, as well as analytical and interpretive talents developed in relation to a broad range of issues and disciplines.

I once asked the personnel director for a major aerospace company what kind of student he is most eager to recruit. “I’ll always go for the philosophy major,” he said. “They know nothing about aerospace, but they know everything about complexity, and that’s what I need.” I would like to give that man a bullhorn, or perhaps elect him governor of Massachusetts.

*Second:* If we, as liberal arts educators, aren’t offering our students specialized or professional training, what exactly are we offering them? One answer, and for me the most important, is this: we’re offering them the past. The present and future too, of course: the latest economic theory, the cutting edge technique in genetics, and so forth. But, above all, we are offering the past—the story of where human beings have been, what we have achieved, how we have failed. If anything is at the core of our mission, I would say that is it.

But for many people, including some of our best educated, the past has ceased to be something real, or at least important to their lives. For many, human experience itself has become fossilized or

commodified, something to be preserved in museums and monographs, but not something that calls to us with an urgent, or admonitory, or sympathetic voice.

I am probably overstating here, but why stop now? We seem to have persuaded ourselves that our historical circumstances are so much more complex and dangerous than those of earlier generations that a fundamental discontinuity has arisen in human experience, and we therefore have little to gain from trying to appreciate the exact ways in which people before us have lived, hoped, feared, suffered, and created.

We have, in other words, come to live too much in the present moment, without a deep enough interest in how this moment was shaped by the long process of historical development. I might even want to suggest, not entirely facetiously, that a governing emblem of our age is the digital clock. Clocks used to image the progress of time itself, but the digital clock gives no hint of what came before or will come after. The only sign it gives is of the present moment.

There are other signs that we are coming to live in a presentist world of results, not of process or development. Fewer and fewer people, myself included, can perform elementary mathematical operations; we push buttons on calculators, and the result is displayed. Politicians, advertisers, and filmmakers wire us to electronic boxes that display our instantaneous responses—often second by second—to a political speech, sales pitch, or work of art. The present moment, the immediate response, is what is valued and acted on.

There are, in short, forces at work in our culture and society that can leave us unmoored from the past, caught up in the singularity of the present moment, not knowing or much caring by what process we arrived here, reacting to—rather than reflecting on—what we experience.

In such a context, it is perhaps harder for us to explain, in ways that large numbers of people will find convincing, the overarching value of hearing the story that liberal arts institutions seek to tell: the story of the past as something important in its own right, the story

of how people before us have responded to challenges different from, but analogous to, our own.

*Finally.* I've been talking about some of the forces outside the academy that make the liberal arts project harder to justify to the public at large. But we should look inward too, asking whether we take sufficient advantage of the distinctive opportunities for learning that our personalized form of education allows, and that might become a more prominent part of the rationale we give when explaining our mission.

I do not exactly want to engage the debate about whether higher education should have moral ambitions. I would prefer to frame the question in slightly—though only slightly—less loaded terms, and ask whether we require students often enough to make value judgments, and to articulate, with rigor and flair, personal opinions and preferences.

I suspect that we do not. I suspect that we are more likely to teach students how to interpret a metaphor, or to catalog the multiple meanings the writer has embedded in a poem, than to ask them larger, more personally directed questions, like: whether this is a good or bad poem; by what standards of taste or judgment we'd call it good or bad; and, God forbid, whether the meaning the poem asserts seems true and important to our lives.

Perhaps we should be less embarrassed than we often are to take it as our institutional mission, and pedagogical opportunity, to help students develop a personal stance toward what they know, and to ask them more regularly to put on the line not only their knowledge and analytical abilities, but also their beliefs and values.

We live in a world where it is possible to know so much, and judge so little. So, in articulating and justifying the liberal arts mission to ourselves and to the wider world, perhaps we should claim, and be sure we have the right to claim, this distinction: Not only "value added," but "values added."



## II. THE PRESENT

### ECONOMIC PRESSURES

TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT







II. THE PRESENT  
ECONOMIC PRESSURES

## The Economic Challenges of Liberal Arts Colleges

*Lucie Lapovsky*

Liberal arts colleges are operating in very difficult times these days. The universe of liberal arts colleges includes several hundred institutions although we tend to think only of the “medallion” institutions.<sup>1</sup> Among these institutions there are fewer than 50 that I would classify as medallion colleges. In the data that I will present later in this paper, the medallion institutions are those defined by *U.S. News and World Report* as the top national liberal arts colleges in the country. The medallion colleges are those that attract large cadres of highly qualified students. These institutions can easily fill their class with students of a very high quality usually more than once from their applicant pools. This group of institutions offers financial aid to students primarily to provide economic diversity to their student body. All of these institutions charge high tuitions and most have significant endowments. Among these institutions there is an “arms race,” as Gordon Winston refers to it,<sup>2</sup> to increase their attractiveness to this elite body of students, but most of these institutions have the resources to effectively compete with each other.

Another, much larger, group of liberal arts institutions finds that they are unable to fill their classes with appropriately qualified students at their published price. They are on a merry-go-round—of price increases accompanied by increases in their discount rates—which continues to increase in speed. They continue to raise their price in order to maintain their competitive position among

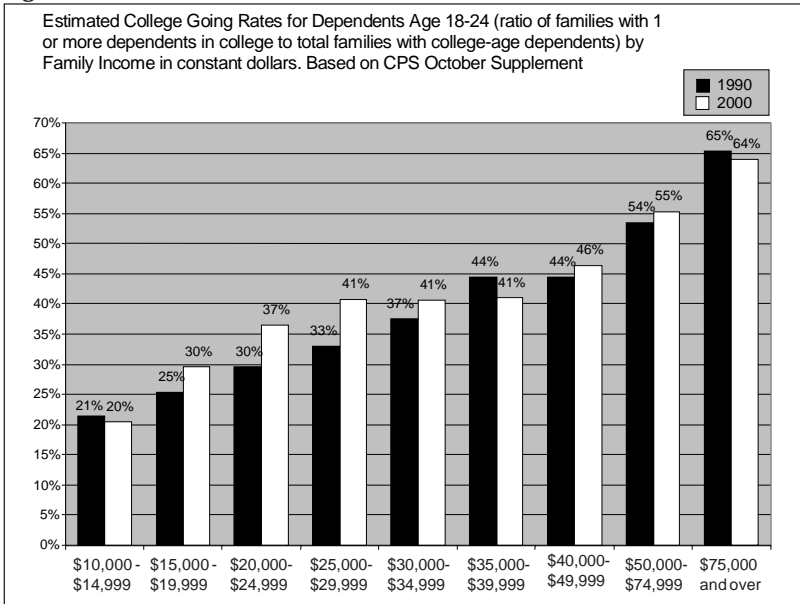
their peers while they work at milking their demand curves to attract more students of the quality level that they want. They desperately hope that the better students to whom they offer large incentives to attend will have a coattail which will bring other high-ability students who are both able and willing to pay their published price or at least a price closer to the published price. This does not seem to be working for most of these institutions. The relative stress in the industry is quite different between that experienced by the medallion institutions and the situation faced by the other liberal arts colleges. The “non-medallion” liberal arts colleges face real issues of survival in this century, and each year we see a few of them die. I would speculate that this trend might gain momentum so that in 20 years we will have a very different landscape in this segment of higher education. Thus throughout this paper, I will discuss threats to the sector as a whole and will also discuss the differences between and among the liberal arts institutions themselves.

### **Demographic Shifts—Growing Minority Population**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau projections for 2003 to 2010, there will be increases in the 18- to 24-year-old population, the traditional college age population. But the growth in this population will be different from any that we have experienced in prior decades: white non-Hispanic traditional age students will increase three percent, while Hispanic and black students are projected to increase by 21 percent and 12 percent respectively. This growing population of students will come largely from families in which neither parent will have gone to college. As the demographics continue to shift in favor of minority and low income students, liberal arts colleges other than the medallion institutions (which are always going to be in a position where demand far exceeds the supply) are going to have greater and greater difficulty recruiting students who are both able to pay their price and interested in the product they are offering. The table following (Figure 1), showing data for 1990 and 2000, indicates significant differences in the college-going rates by income class. The college-going rate of 18- to 24-year-olds who come from families with incomes between

\$10,000 and \$14,999 is 20 percent, compared with 64 percent for 18- to 24-year-olds who come from families with incomes over \$75,000. Positive changes in the college-going rate have occurred for 18- to 24-year-olds who come from families with incomes between \$15,000 and \$34,999 during these 10 years, although their rates of college attendance are still more than 20 percentage points below the rates of the higher income students.

Figure 1.



## A Liberal Arts Education

A basic liberal arts education is a “product” that does not appeal to many students. Most students today want to go to college to get a job. This is almost universally true for the first generation college students who are an increasing percent of the 18-year-olds in this country; they are going to college to participate in the American Dream. The relevance of the curriculum of a liberal arts college is often difficult for them to grasp, yet we know that this is the best preparation for them for life. It prepares them to go out in the world to be able to do many things although often nothing specifically. We teach our students to think critically rather than to “be”

something. Clearly this allows them to have a great deal of career flexibility which they do not have when they are narrowly trained for a profession. We are “selling” what we think they need but not necessarily what these students want. This leads many liberal arts institutions to increase expenditures on career services and on experiential learning in order to increase the professional relevance of the learning experience. In addition, marketing and admissions budgets are continually growing in order to reach these students and persuade them that a liberal arts education is really what they want.

### **The Production Function Is Very Costly**

A liberal arts education is expensive to offer. In most incarnations, it requires providing students with a great number of curricular choices. Providing choice leads to inefficiencies in the process. Classes are uneven in size, and predictability of enrollment in classes is often quite difficult. There is usually a commitment to small classes, which leads to classes varying in size from five students to 30 students, a very expensive and inefficient way to operate.

The delivery of the education at our traditional colleges is by faculty, with many colleges very dependent on full-time faculty. The workload of the faculty, in terms of teaching expectations, differs among the liberal arts institutions, but usually ranges between four and eight courses a year. This is a tremendous range and has serious implications for the differences in teaching costs among these institutions. Another variable which has even larger cost implications in terms of the cost of delivering the curriculum is the dependence or lack of dependence on adjunct faculty. A course taught by an adjunct faculty member will cost anywhere from 10 percent to 30 percent of the cost of having a full-time faculty member teach it. Finally, there are significant salary differences among full-time faculty at different institutions. There are pressures at most institutions to reduce teaching load, reduce dependence on adjunct faculty, and increase salaries; these are all variables that increase financial pressure on the liberal arts colleges.

Most liberal arts colleges are being pressured by student demands to provide more services and better amenities to students. The

current generation is very consumer conscious. They want dorms that provide them accommodations much more similar to what they were used to growing up. They want bathrooms shared by few students; they often prefer suites which give small groups of students their own living rooms and often their own kitchens. This has led to a rash of dormitory renovations and construction of many new residence halls. The non-medallion institutions led the way in this movement in order to acquire a competitive advantage, but many medallion institutions have followed along with ambitious building projects so that they remain extremely attractive to the best and brightest students in the country. In addition to new housing, students are demanding what I call “Club Med” amenities. They want state-of-the-art, conveniently located gyms with long hours. They want coffee houses on campus and a variety of other amenities. New gyms and student centers are being constructed all over to satisfy these needs. In addition, the demand for student services continues to grow. These include learning centers, tutoring, counseling, and many other student services.

### **The For-Profit Sector**

In addition, the competitive landscape is changing. Significant new competition has come from a newly recognized for-profit sector of higher education. This sector teaches primarily career-oriented programs which are sequenced and offer few choices for students. This in itself offers a very different production function for the provision of the curriculum; it is a much more efficient curriculum to offer. This sector tends not to use faculty in the ways we know, and certainly does not have tenure and other costly aspects of more traditional higher education. These institutions are able to operate much more cost effectively than traditional colleges. They are also quite clear and focused on the product that they are selling. They rarely offer the “student life amenities” that the traditional colleges feel are an important part of the market basket of goods which one calls college. These colleges have great appeal to the first generation college market.



This new segment of higher education focuses on the older student as well as the 18-year-old college market. The older student market is one that many liberal arts colleges have been developing in the last 10 or 15 years as a way to diversify their product offering and to subsidize their undergraduate liberal arts programs. Many liberal arts colleges offer special programs for older students that rely exclusively on adjunct faculty and frequently have very targeted curricula with few choices, thus making these programs far more cost effective to provide than their traditional liberal arts undergraduate offerings. These programs often produce significant surpluses which are used to subsidize the traditional programs. These new for-profit institutions are competing very directly for this market which I call the peripheral market of the liberal arts colleges. This is the “low hanging fruit” and it is where the for-profit sector is growing at an astonishing rate.

### **Tuition Pricing and Discounting**

There has been much talk in the press in the last several years about tuition discounting, a very basic concept which is simply the practice of charging a student less than the published tuition price to attend a college or university. For the last several years, questions have been raised about where the higher education industry is moving in terms of its pricing and financial aid strategies. Is tuition going to continue to increase? Are schools going to continue their practice of providing scholarships to significant numbers of students? Will the published price continue to lose meaning and, if so, what will the consequences be? What impact do pricing and discounting strategies have on access to higher education? What impact do tuition pricing and discounting strategies have on cost containment, on resources available for programmatic enhancements, on the quality of higher education and on the financial equilibrium of higher education? Finally, we are taking a terrible beating in the press and in Congress over our tuition increases when in reality the net price to students is rising at a much slower rate than the published price, yet we continue to follow this strategy. Why?

### **Tuition Discount Rate**

There now exist 12 years of tuition, financial aid, and enrollment data from a large sample of independent institutions from the National Association of Colleges and University Business Officers (NACUBO) tuition discounting survey. The data show that on average, and for an overwhelming majority of the individual institutions, decisions have been made to increase financial aid faster than stated tuition rates, resulting in real revenue (net tuition) growth that has been decidedly lackluster if not, in many instances, actually negative from one year to the next.

In fall 2002 the average discount rate across the medallion institutions was 32.8 percent for freshmen, compared with 40 percent among the other institutions. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in 1990 when the average discount rate was 25 percent at both sets of institutions. (The tuition discount rate is defined here as institutional financial aid provided to freshmen [both endowed and unendowed] divided by the gross tuition revenue from freshmen.) The discount rate at the medallion institutions has increased 31 percent during this period while the discount rate at the non-medallion institutions has increased 60 percent.

While need unmet by federal and state aid, along with the changing demographics of the 18-year-old population in this country, has driven much of the increase in the average discount rate at the medallion institutions, the increase over the past 12 years at the non-medallion institutions is due largely to the addition or substitution of merit or characteristic-based aid. In 1990, many of the liberal arts institutions and almost all of the medallion institutions provided only need-based aid, with the exception of athletic scholarships at some of these institutions. Today, just about all of the non-medallion liberal arts colleges and even some of the medallion institutions are providing merit aid to enhance the marketing of high-priced educational services to price-sensitive middle class and affluent families who are often unwilling to pay the published price. Today, the income of students at the four-year public institutions in many states is higher than at the private colleges, further evidence of this phenomenon of unwillingness to pay the published tuition price.

At the heart of this issue is, quite simply, the confluence of each institution's need for a robust revenue stream to pay for the things that keep the institution competitive, and families' willingness or in many cases unwillingness to pay the published price. The core of the strategy is to provide incentives to those desirable students who are able to pay, according to the traditional need-based aid formulas, but are unwilling to pay the sticker price to attend the institution. Thus, one must ask whether discounting actually increases the revenue available by increasing enrollment or whether it takes resources away from needy students or from programmatic improvements by subsidizing students who already would attend. The answer to these questions differs by institution, and the answer in the aggregate is unclear.

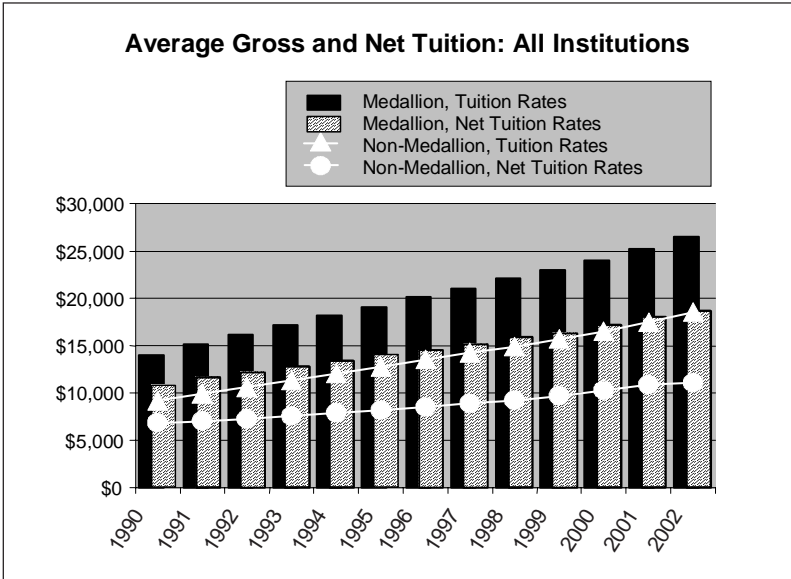
At many institutions, tuition discounting is a necessary strategy to fill up all of the seats in the class. Other institutions use discounting to shape their class, that is, to ensure that students with certain characteristics valued by the institution enroll in adequate numbers. Institutions that discount tuition to shape their class believe that their institution would become weaker if they didn't have enough "strong" students.

### **Tuition and Net Tuition**

The average tuition at the medallion institutions has increased 82 percent over these 12 years, from an average of \$13,997 in 1990 to \$26,496 in fall 2002 (Figure 2). By comparison, the average tuition at the other institutions increased 102 percent from \$9,169 to \$18,571. But the net tuition of the other institutions increased only 62 percent while the net tuition of the medallion institutions increased 72 percent during this time. Thus while the relative price gap between the medallion and the other institutions narrowed, the gap in net tuition widened, giving the other institutions fewer tuition dollars per student in both absolute and relative terms compared to the medallion institutions.

There have been a few experiments with significant reductions in the published price, Muskingum College being among the most discussed and analyzed. The condition usually present for a price

Figure 2.



reduction is a situation where almost all, if not all, the students are receiving institutional financial aid, and the college wants to reposition itself in terms of price vis-à-vis its competition. Muskingum hired Gallop to do its public relations research and the research indicated that a price decrease would be well received, although the research also indicated that parents and students still wanted scholarships as well. In 1996 Muskingum reduced its tuition by 35 percent and its average scholarship award per student by 67 percent. It continued to discount its tuition to most of its students even after it lowered its price but the discounting was significantly less. Muskingum experienced an enrollment increase the following fall, so this strategy worked for them. Since the Muskingum experiment in the mid-1990s, there have been a few colleges each year that have used a strategy of lowering their published price to reposition themselves, but this is not a trend that has taken off. For example, between 2001 and 2002, only two institutions in the NACUBO study reduced their price.

Many institutions fear that students relate price to quality, and that a lower price will lead students to put that institution in a lower quality group; this is known as the “Chivas Regal effect.” There is not much empirical evidence on this phenomenon but it is a strongly held belief. Many institutions find that parents and students respond to scholarships, which are awarded based on the “outstanding” characteristics of the student. Many institutions find that they need to continually increase their published price so that they can do lots of selective discounting.

Might a high price keep some people from applying to the institution? Maybe; one strategy that several institutions are using to reduce the number of prospective students “scared off” by a high published price is to publicly announce that a student with certain characteristics will receive a scholarship from the institution. For example, some institutions will give full tuition scholarships to any students who rank number one or two in their high school class. Institutions are trying hard to find ways to shift their demand curves out while maintaining flexibility in awarding aid and not risking a price change in terms of their competitive position.

To the extent that the merit aid or characteristic-based aid strategies have been substituted for need-based aid, this enrollment management approach has reduced educational access to the economically disadvantaged while providing financial subsidies to those with the ability to pay, and has reduced resources available for educational programming. Clearly, if an institution could fill up its classes with “appropriate” students, however defined, there would be more funds available for programmatic improvements or less need to increase tuition as quickly as it has been increasing. The situation of providing greater subsidies to the middle class has been further exacerbated in recent years by both federal and state policies. Federal tax credits and IRAs for education are clearly middle class benefits, while the new trend in state financial aid towards merit-based aid, following in the footsteps of the HOPE scholarship program originating in Arkansas, is also primarily a middle-class subsidy.

### **Fewer Students Pay Published Tuition Price**

Enrollment continues to grow at independent institutions in the United States, and the number of students receiving institutional financial aid continues to grow significantly at all institutions except the medallion institutions. The tuition discount rate can alternatively be calculated by looking at its component parts: the percent of students receiving institutional aid and the average institutional award per student.

In fall 1990, 47 percent of the students at the medallion institutions received institutional financial aid, compared with 64 percent at the other institutions (Figure 3). In fall 2002, the average percent of students receiving institutional aid at the medallion institutions had increased only nine percentage points to 56 percent, while at the other institutions it had increased 22 percentage points to 86 percent of the students.

In fall 2002, at 54 percent of the non-medallion institutions, more than 90 percent of the students received institutional aid. There is no medallion institution in this sample that awards aid to more than 90 percent of its students. This phenomenon of providing aid to significant numbers of students is leading to the “bargaining” phenomenon many parents and students now participate in with the institutions they are considering. The ethos is that no one pays full price, and this is not too far from the truth at the non-medallion institutions.

Institutional aid used to be granted primarily to students to enhance access to higher education for those without the financial resources to attend, and this is still true to a large extent at the medallion institutions (Figure 4). Today, however, most institutions are providing institutional grants to shape their classes, and many, if not most, institutions employ financial aid as a recruitment and retention tool.

### **Average Grant Size Stable**

The average size of the financial aid award, along with the number of students who receive awards, determines how much an institu-

Figure 3.

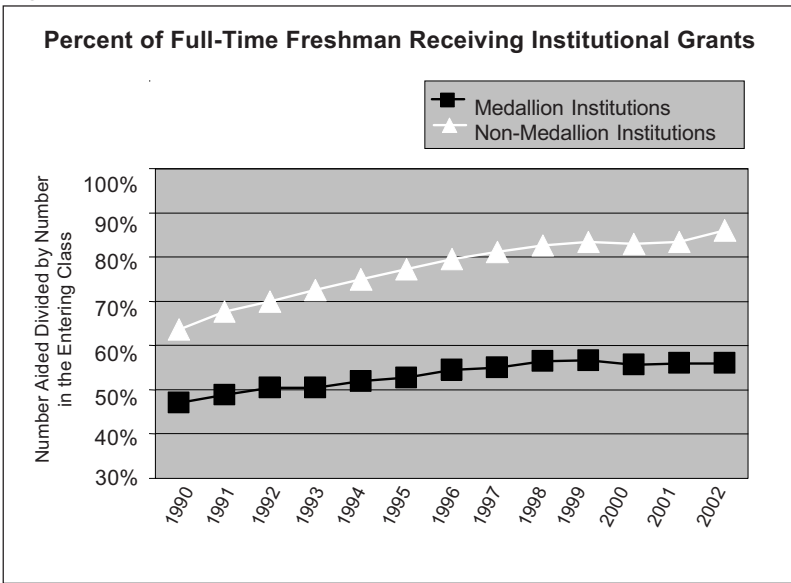
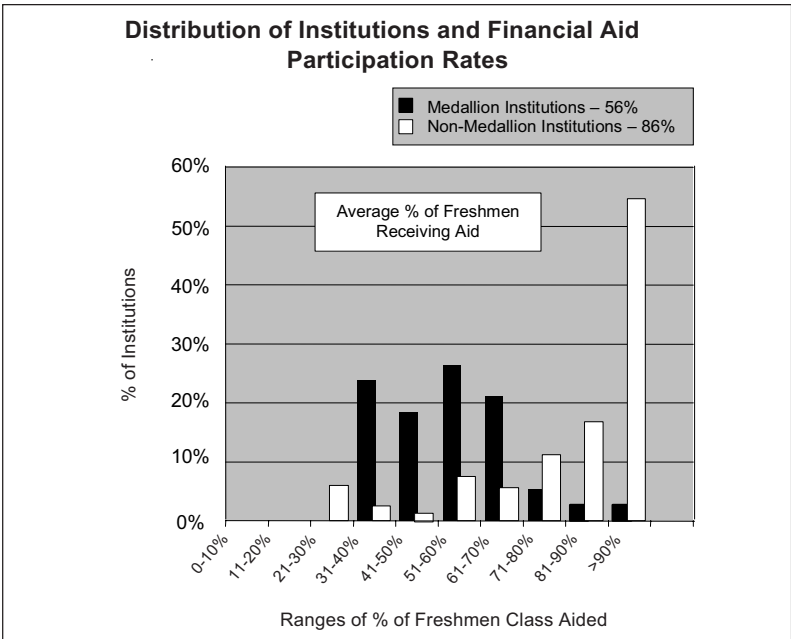


Figure 4.



tion spends on financial aid. While the percent of students receiving aid has increased significantly over the last 12 years, the average award as a percent of tuition has been a much more stable variable (Figure 5). The average award at the medallion institutions has increased slightly over this period, from 58 percent of tuition to 60 percent. At the non-medallion institutions, it has increased from 40 percent of tuition to 46 percent. Thus, the medallion institutions aid a much smaller percent of their class, but their average awards are much larger both in absolute dollars and as a percent of their tuition as compared with the non-medallion institutions.

### **Gross and Net Tuition per Student**

The scatter gram following (Figure 6) shows the relationship between tuition, or gross tuition as I sometimes refer to the published price, and net tuition in fall 2002 for freshmen. The horizontal axis gives the net tuition and the vertical axis gives the gross tuition. The solid line represents equality between gross and net tuition, i.e. no institutionally funded financial aid, no discounting. There are no institutions on this line.

There is a wide range in the relationship between tuition and net tuition. For example, among institutions with a published tuition of \$10,000, the net tuition ranges from less than \$5,000 to just under \$10,000. The differences in the relationship between net tuition and gross tuition reflect the college's institutional financial aid or discounting policies.

How these changes in enrollment impact the financial health of the institution depends greatly on how the institution is operating relative to its capacity. If an institution has excess capacity in terms of facilities and if it has a lower student faculty ratio than is optimal, it can increase enrollment with very few if any additional expenditures. In such a situation, the institution can improve its economic health if there is at least some small increase in net revenue. On the other hand, if the enrollment increase was achieved by increasing institutional financial aid to such an extent that the institution's net revenue fell, then the financial health of the institution will have deteriorated.



Figure 5.

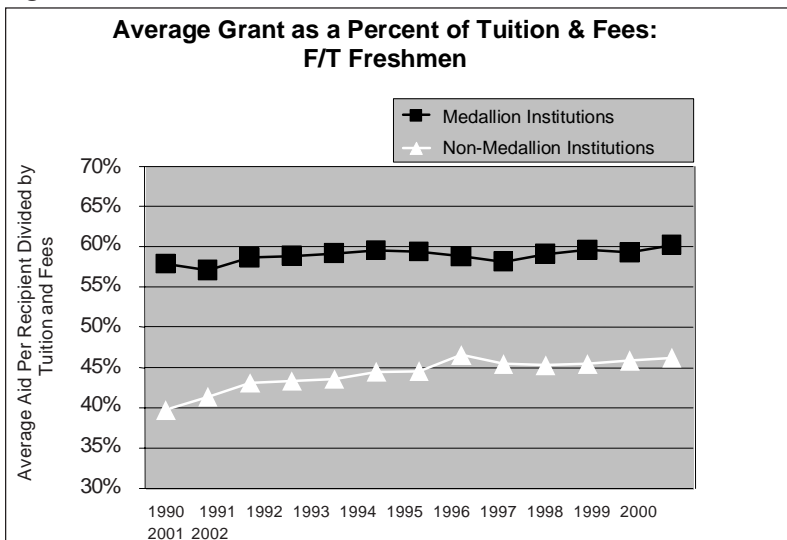
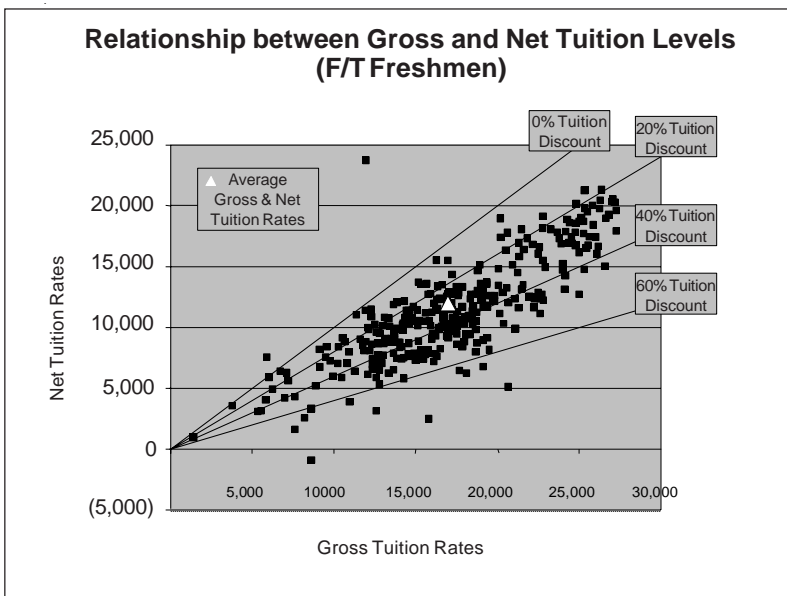


Figure 6.



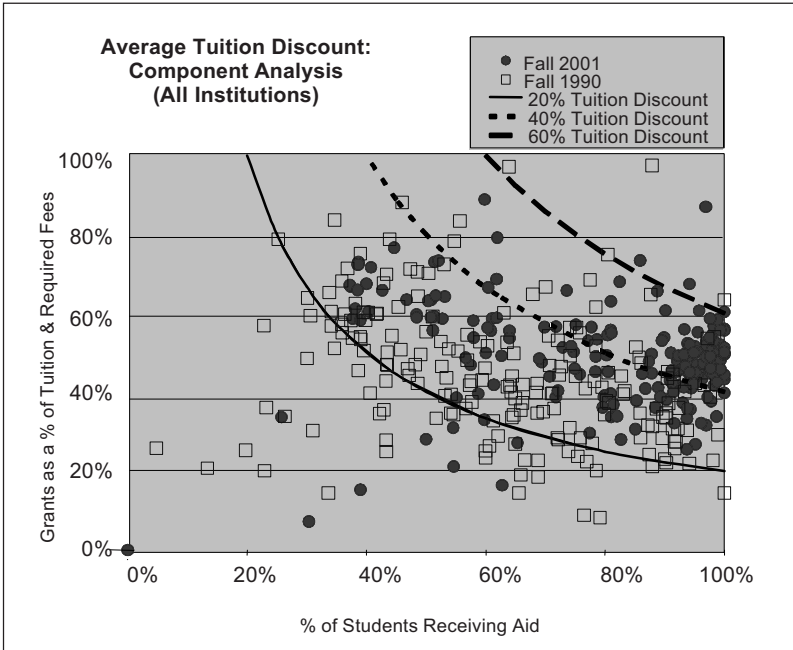
When an institution experiences an increase in enrollment and it is already at capacity, the additional students will require additional expenditures on the part of the institution. If the institution has attained the additional students through significant increases in financial aid, the college will be in the worst of all possible situations, expenditures up and net revenues down. On the other hand, a college may experience an increase in enrollment requiring an increase in expenditures, which is all right if net revenues increase more than the increase in expenditures.

### **Institutional Awarding Strategies: 1990 and 2002**

The scatter gram following (Figure 7) shows the many different combinations of average grant and percent of freshmen aided that institutions use to determine their discount rates. In the diagram, the vertical axis represents the institutional grants as a percent of the tuition or the average award per student, and the horizontal axis represents the percent of students receiving institutional aid. The curved lines represent the discount rate with the first line on the left representing a 20 percent discount rate and the next two lines representing 40 and 60 percent discount rates. Each square represents an institution in the survey in 1990, and the dots represent the institutions in 2002. It is clear that there was a great deal more spread among the institutions in 1990 than in 2002. In 1990 the institutions were clustered around the 20 percent discount rate, while in 2002 they were clustered around the 40 percent rate. It is easy to see the significant increase in the number of students receiving aid in 2002 as compared with 1990.

The discount rate has increased in large part through a significant increase in the percent of students receiving institutional grants, rather than through an increase in the average level of the grant as a percent of tuition. It is clear that many institutions find it advantageous from a marketing point of view to discount their tuition to almost all if not all of their students.

Figure 7.

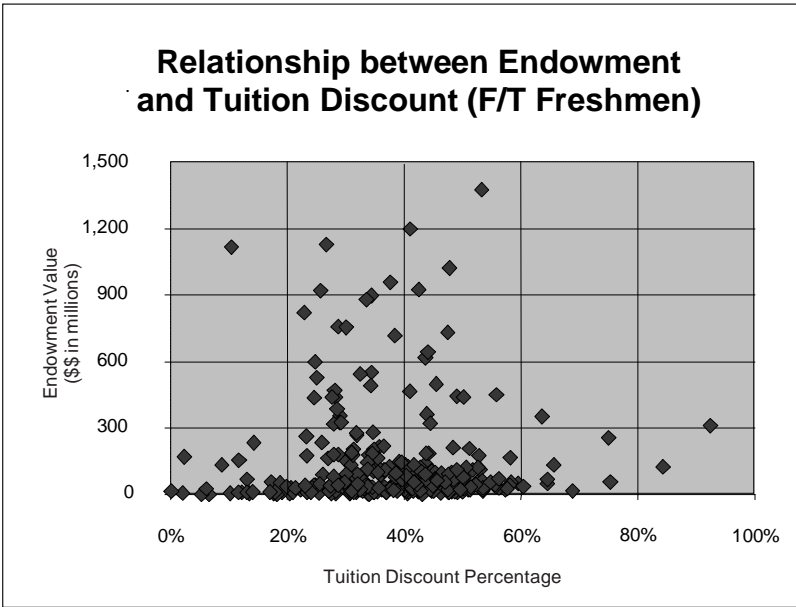


### No Relationship between the Endowment and the Discount Rate

It has often been assumed that there is a positive correlation between a college's endowment and its ability to provide financial aid. The graph following (Figure 8) shows the institutions in the study arrayed by endowment levels (y axis) and discount rates (x axis). A few very high endowment institutions and one very high discount college are not displayed on the graph so that the data for the rest of the institutions may be more clearly shown. The implication of this finding is that institutions with low endowments and high discount rates are reallocating their tuition revenue to support their discount strategy and have to use their tuition revenues for discounting rather than programmatic expenditures.

The graph demonstrates that there is no significant relationship between endowment size and the tuition discount. While there is a slight shift to higher levels of tuition discounting as endowment values decline, the difference between the \$1+ billion endowment

Figure 8.



schools and the less than \$50 million endowment schools is only 6.2 percent—much less than the relative difference in their institutional wealth. Further, there are wide ranges in discounting levels in each tier of endowment, making the averages for each tier less indicative of individual experience.

More simply, relative institutional wealth or poverty does not sharply affect the level of financial aid. Institutional aid is an enrollment management tool. The granting of aid to a significant percent of the class is a necessary tool to fill the class with the number and quality of students that are necessary. Most institutions today are unable to enroll an adequate number of qualified students at their published price. We must continue to ask if this is a pricing merry-go-round and whether the pricing strategy being employed is a rational method for most appropriately attracting the best mix of students to each institution.

## **Current Tuition Pricing Strategy: Implications for Public Policy and for Financial Health of Liberal Arts Colleges**

We currently have a situation where our published price has very little relationship to the institution's cost. At the medallion institutions, the published price is often below the true cost because endowment and annual giving support often more than make up for the discounting and provide additional support for the institution. At the non-medallion institutions, especially those with low endowments that make up the majority of these institutions, the cost of the program usually is less than the published price. There is tremendous stress on those institutions with little endowment and little external support. As discussed at the beginning of the paper, the cost structures of the medallion and non-medallion institutions differ quite significantly, based on faculty work loads, percent of adjunct faculty used in the instruction program, and the amount of facilities and amenities provided students. As the discount rate continues to increase at a much faster pace at the non-medallion institutions, their existence becomes more and more tenuous as the resources that they have to pay for their programs grow more slowly than those at the medallion institutions and the pressure to provide more services continues to grow. The gap between what is affordable and what is desired increases and makes the situation more difficult each year.

Finally, discounting leads to continual increases in published price so that there is more room to discount. This continues in the face of Congressional disapproval of pricing strategy. This concern has now reached a new peak with the bill in Congress [HR 3519] that threatens sanctions on institutions that continue to increase tuition beyond certain percentage increases. [It is puzzling that this strategy, which places great stress on the industry and brings tremendous negative publicity to our colleges, continues. But I think it is a merry-go-round that all would need to jump off of at the same time.

Many believe that the continuing increase in tuition discounting is in part a response to the increased use of it and the increased consumer understanding of it. In addition, discounting continues

to grow in part as a logical consequence of the increasingly fierce competition for academically stellar students, in part as a reflection of the increased competition for these students from public institutions, particularly the flagship universities, and in part as a result of the commodity-like marketing presentation and comparison of educational services through rankings and lists in combination with an increasing consumer mentality focusing on convenience, service, quality and cost. Certainly, whatever the driving forces underlying this shift towards characteristic-based aid, this strategy—using aid to attract and retain the unwilling to pay—will feed upon itself. Because this approach goes beyond more objectively measured need (however flawed the federal and institutional methodologies may be for determining family contribution) into the discretionary application of funds, characteristic-based aid can, and predictably will, be much more subject to escalation in response to competition among institutions. Discounting is also clearly no longer a strategy for private institutions only. More and more public institutions are offering a variety of scholarship programs to attract high-ability students, student leaders, and other categories of desired students.

### **Final Thoughts**

Liberal arts colleges are in for a difficult period, and the question is what the landscape will look like in 20 years. As the student population changes, as competition from new market entrants increases, and as pricing and discounting continue to increase, the stress on this segment of the market will continue to grow. The offsetting positive indicators are that the tuition gap between public and private institutions has narrowed a good deal in the last two years as the public institutions have faced severe financial hardship with state cutbacks. We even have the example of one public institution, Miami University of Ohio, adopting a private college pricing and discounting strategy. This trend toward significant reduction in state support for the public sector of higher education may level the playing field in terms of tuition between public and

private institutions in the coming years. Finally, the phenomenon of adults returning to higher education continues to increase, thus ensuring continued high demand for a college degree. The question will be if liberal arts colleges can make a sufficient case for the provision of their degrees.

## Notes

1. See for example Robert Zemsky's keynote address in "Academic Reforms in the World: Situation and Perspective in the Massification Stage of Higher Education (Reports of the 1997 Six-Nation Higher Education Project Seminar)," RIHE International Seminar Reports 10 (July 1997): 1-28. <[http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat\\_Id=17](http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat_Id=17)>.
2. Gordon C. Winston, "Subsidies, Hierarchy and Peers: The Awkward Economics of Higher Education," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13.1 (Winter 1999): 30.

## Discounts and Spending at the Leading Liberal Arts Colleges

*Roger T. Kaufman*

Let me start by thanking Frank Oakley and the ACLS for inviting me to participate in this conference and Lucie Lapovsky for her stimulating but occasionally depressing paper. I apologize in advance if my remarks upset some of you. I find that provocative comments often generate useful discussion. If mine do, they will have served their purpose. Although my research has only recently addressed issues in the economics of higher education, I was introduced to this area as a senior at Williams College. Steve Lewis, who is with us at this conference, was then provost; he hired me and a friend to travel to about six liberal arts colleges during our Winter Study period in January 1970. We interviewed students, professors, deans, and administrators to uncover relationships between the college budgets and the quality of student life, academic and otherwise. We had a great time even though our report disappointed Steve, for which I belatedly apologize.

Yet I come here today not only as a graduate of a liberal arts college and an economist who studies them. I have spent my career teaching at some of the best liberal arts colleges, including Smith, Amherst, and Williams. I agree with Lucie Lapovsky (and also with David Breneman, who could not be here today) that liberal arts colleges, which I shall call LACs, provide some of the best undergraduate education in America, although I think there is ample room for improvement. Finally, I come here as a parent of a daughter who is a sophomore at Middlebury College and a son who is a high school senior looking primarily at liberal arts colleges.



I'd like to begin by suggesting that it is important to distinguish between a liberal arts education and a liberal arts education taught at a liberal arts college. Lapovsky is correct in noting that today's students are increasingly interested in the vocational aspects of higher education, a trend that imperils liberal arts education. Yet the LACs are also being hit by the apparently increasing attractiveness of the liberal arts education provided by private and public universities. During this conference we should separate these two effects whenever possible.

As Lapovsky notes, liberal arts colleges can be divided into at least two groups. The first group of around 40-50 so-called medallion colleges<sup>1</sup> (most of which are in *U.S. News and World Report's* top 50) typically accept fewer than half of their applicants and can be characterized as facing an excess demand for their undergraduate spaces in the sense that they deny admission to many high-quality students who are able and willing to pay full tuition. These schools use institutional financial aid primarily to subsidize low-income students, although in recent years even these schools are introducing merit aid. While the remaining LACs use institutional financial aid for this purpose, too, they must also use it to attract middle- and upper-income students in order to achieve their enrollment targets, shape their class, and meet budgetary targets. Discounting to middle- and upper-income students can actually save money if it induces them to matriculate and thereby take the place of a low-income high-need student.

It is important to note that the discount rate that Lapovsky uses in her paper is defined differently than the discount rate Breneman presented in *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?*<sup>2</sup> Lapovsky's discount rate is calculated as:

$$\text{(Total Institutional Financial Aid)/}(\text{Gross Tuition Revenue}),$$

where the denominator is the product of the published tuition multiplied by total enrollment. This product represents what gross tuition revenue would be if all students paid the full tuition.

Consequently, Lapovsky's discount rate represents the percentage reduction in tuition that is provided by the institution to the average student.

In his book Breneman introduces a similar discount rate, but his numerator includes only unrestricted or unfunded institutional financial aid—he does not include restricted or funded institutional financial aid as part of the discount. Presumably, these endowment funds are excluded because they can only be used for financial aid; expenditures from them do not represent a burden on the institution. Consequently, Breneman's discount rates are substantially less than those calculated by Lapovsky.

Although I am not experienced in fund-raising, I find Breneman's asymmetry misleading and unconvincing. It implies that donors who contributed to these restricted funds would not have been willing to contribute anything to other projects at the college. It also implies that donors will also reduce their future donations by one dollar for every dollar reduction in future financial aid. I question these assumptions. If a school has to seek contributions to restricted endowment to fund aggressive discounting, it seems more appropriate to assume that it is still giving up prospective funding for alternative educational purposes. Consequently, I favor Lapovsky's approach.

Lapovsky finds that the average financial aid grant as a percentage of tuition remained relatively stable between 1990 and 2002. She also finds that the average discount rose during this period from about 25 percent among most LACs in 1990 to 33 percent at the medallion LACs and an alarming 40 percent at other LACs. These seemingly contradictory findings occurred because there have been big increases in the percentage of students who receive financial aid. I suspect that Breneman's discount rates also would have risen significantly during the past decade. These increases in discount rates are ominous, especially for non-medallion LACs because of the future changes in the composition of the student age population that Lapovsky describes.

Breneman and Lapovsky imply that the lower discount rates at some schools reflect their greater ability to attract the kind of students they want. Note, however, that low discount rates may occur for other reasons. Schools that attract large numbers of students from affluent families will have fewer students on financial aid and hence lower average discount rates. Of course, there is a high correlation between student quality (as conventionally measured) and family income, so the schools that attract the best students will *ceteris paribus* have fewer needy students. Consequently, when Lapovsky reports that 56 percent of students at the medallion LACs receive institutional financial aid compared with 86 percent at other LACs, the difference may not solely reflect discounting in order to reach enrollment or budgetary targets. In order to identify the extent to which my concern is important, it would be useful to have additional data on the percentage of students who receive need-based financial aid at each of these schools. Lapovsky also points out that most non-medallion LACs might be better off if they mutually agreed to reduce or even eliminate discounting for non-needy students. While this may be true, it might also violate U.S. antitrust laws.

In my research with Geoffrey Woglom of Amherst College, we find that the differences that Lapovsky illustrates between medallion and non-medallion LACs are also manifest in comparisons between the wealthiest medallion LACs and the other medallion LACs. In Table 1, I present several relevant financial statistics for the leading 49 LACs according to the 2002 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*.<sup>3</sup> The schools are listed in order of net assets per full-time student in June 2001. The main component of total assets at most of these schools is the endowment, but it also includes the book value of plant, equipment, and collections, and the value of life funds. Liabilities include debt, the present value of life income payments, etc. All data were taken from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and College Board surveys.

Table 1.

| Summary Financial Statistics |   |                         |                        |  |   |  |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|--|---|--|
| FY 2000/01                   |   |                         |                        |  |   |  |
| Rank Name                    | Net Assets<br>per FT Student<br>End of Yr | Expenses<br>per Student | Sticker<br>Comp<br>Fee | Estimated<br>Subsidy per<br>full-paying<br>Student | Estimated<br>Net Comp<br>Fee per<br>Student |  |
|                              | (1)                                       | (2)                     | (3)                    | (4)  | (5)   |  |
| 1 Grinnell                   | \$ 874,971                                | \$ 45,977               | \$ 26,320              | \$ 19,657  | \$ 16,523                                   |  |
| 2 Pomona                     | \$ 870,617                                | \$ 47,727               | \$ 32,340              | \$ 15,387  | \$ 23,642                                   |  |
| 3 Swarthmore                 | \$ 747,971                                | \$ 60,402               | \$ 34,538              | \$ 25,864  | \$ 24,279                                   |  |
| 4 Williams                   | \$ 726,865                                | \$ 56,599               | \$ 31,520              | \$ 25,079  | \$ 19,589                                   |  |
| 5 Amherst                    | \$ 649,239                                | \$ 47,369               | \$ 34,358              | \$ 13,011  | \$ 23,798                                   |  |
| 6 Wellesley                  | \$ 600,616                                | \$ 67,316               | \$ 33,394              | \$ 33,922  | NA  |  |
| 7 Wabash                     | \$ 485,125                                | \$ 41,429               | \$ 25,285              | \$ 16,144  | \$ 11,244                                   |  |
| 8 Claremont                  | \$ 439,670                                | \$ 44,659               | \$ 30,000              | \$ 14,659  | \$ 21,319                                   |  |
| 9 Bryn Mawr                  | \$ 417,236                                | \$ 51,556               | \$ 33,360              | \$ 18,196  | \$ 24,799                                   |  |
| 10 Smith                     | \$ 403,221                                | \$ 46,945               | \$ 33,302              | \$ 13,643  | \$ 22,131                                   |  |
| 11 Washington & Lee          | \$ 388,678                                | \$ 39,138               | \$ 24,545              | \$ 14,593  | \$ 18,426                                   |  |
| 12 Bowdoin                   | \$ 370,001                                | \$ 51,841               | \$ 34,280              | \$ 17,561  | \$ 28,465                                   |  |
| 13 Macalester                | \$ 350,718                                | \$ 34,242               | \$ 28,814              | \$ 5,428   | \$ 16,830                                   |  |
| 14 Haverford                 | \$ 346,398                                | \$ 44,422               | \$ 32,850              | \$ 11,572  | \$ 28,835                                   |  |
| 15 Middlebury                | \$ 336,573                                | \$ 57,099               | \$ 32,955              | \$ 24,144  | NA  |  |
| 16 Carleton                  | \$ 334,220                                | \$ 41,156               | \$ 30,780              | \$ 10,376  | \$ 22,494                                   |  |
| 17 Vassar                    | \$ 331,997                                | \$ 41,982               | \$ 33,450              | \$ 8,532   | \$ 24,953                                   |  |
| 18 Scripps                   | \$ 318,097                                | \$ 37,246               | \$ 32,500              | \$ 4,746   | \$ 15,214                                   |  |
| 19 Harvey Mudd               | \$ 305,332                                | \$ 47,020               | \$ 31,605              | \$ 15,415  | \$ 25,523                                   |  |
| 20 Hamilton                  | \$ 305,245                                | \$ 40,552               | \$ 34,150              | \$ 6,402   | \$ 26,933                                   |  |
| 21 Davidson                  | \$ 291,804                                | \$ 40,609               | \$ 30,823              | \$ 9,786   | \$ 24,517                                   |  |
| 22 Lafayette                 | \$ 278,770                                | \$ 35,516               | \$ 32,655              | \$ 2,861   | \$ 22,703                                   |  |
| 23 Colby                     | \$ 276,972                                | \$ 39,688               | \$ 34,290              | \$ 5,398   | \$ 31,840                                   |  |
| 24 Colorado College          | \$ 266,901                                | \$ 33,922               | \$ 30,957              | \$ 2,965   | \$ 22,973                                   |  |
| 25 DePauw                    | \$ 262,722                                | \$ 41,453               | \$ 26,874              | \$ 14,579  | \$ 23,239                                   |  |
| 26 Whitman                   | \$ 259,659                                | \$ 26,983               | \$ 29,082              | \$ (2,099)   | \$ 18,021                                   |  |
| 27 Mt. Holyoke               | \$ 257,075                                | \$ 40,017               | \$ 33,090              | \$ 6,927   | \$ 23,421                                   |  |
| 28 Oberlin                   | \$ 253,840                                | \$ 48,435               | \$ 31,719              | \$ 16,716  | NA  |  |
| 29 U. of the South           | \$ 244,350                                | \$ 40,471               | \$ 27,290              | \$ 13,181  | \$ 24,869                                   |  |
| 30 Trinity                   | \$ 235,550                                | \$ 51,677               | \$ 32,600              | \$ 19,077  | \$ 28,910                                   |  |
| 31 Wesleyan                  | \$ 224,321                                | \$ 43,990               | \$ 34,050              | \$ 9,940   | \$ 24,692                                   |  |
| 32 Colgate                   | \$ 217,514                                | \$ 35,049               | \$ 33,480              | \$ 1,569   | \$ 24,457                                   |  |
| 33 Rhodes                    | \$ 209,878                                | \$ 27,080               | \$ 26,356              | \$ 724   | \$ 16,612                                   |  |
| 34 Occidental                | \$ 190,531                                | \$ 33,065               | \$ 32,277              | \$ 788   | \$ 20,377                                   |  |
| 35 Bucknell                  | \$ 180,933                                | \$ 31,594               | \$ 29,435              | \$ 2,159   | \$ 23,493                                   |  |
| 36 Franklin & Marshall       | \$ 178,568                                | \$ 33,396               | \$ 30,860              | \$ 2,536   | \$ 24,877                                   |  |
| 37 Centre                    | \$ 168,573                                | \$ 30,144               | \$ 22,450              | \$ 7,694   | \$ 17,518                                   |  |
| 38 Union                     | \$ 158,822                                | \$ 31,498               | \$ 31,602              | \$ (104)   | \$ 22,999                                   |  |
| 39 Bates                     | \$ 148,834                                | \$ 37,226               | \$ 34,100              | \$ 3,126   | \$ 23,253                                   |  |
| 40 Holy Cross                | \$ 148,217                                | \$ 33,207               | \$ 32,780              | \$ 427   | \$ 26,632                                   |  |
| 41 Kenyon                    | \$ 146,781                                | \$ 34,546               | \$ 30,450              | \$ 4,096   | \$ 26,012                                   |  |
| 42 Furman                    | \$ 146,722                                | \$ 27,953               | \$ 25,492              | \$ 2,461   | \$ 18,738                                   |  |
| 43 Bard                      | \$ 122,010                                | \$ 40,770               | \$ 34,588              | \$ 6,182   | \$ 19,209                                   |  |
| 44 Connecticut               | \$ 108,197                                | \$ 40,713               | \$ 33,585              | \$ 7,128   | \$ 26,202                                   |  |
| 45 Skidmore                  | \$ 104,513                                | \$ 34,911               | \$ 34,200              | \$ 711   | \$ 28,152                                   |  |
| 46 Gettysburg                | \$ 97,344                                 | \$ 31,579               | \$ 32,270              | \$ (691)   | \$ 24,526                                   |  |
| 47 Dickinson                 | \$ 93,142                                 | \$ 31,289               | \$ 32,235              | \$ (946)   | \$ 22,071                                   |  |
| 48 Barnard                   | \$ 89,301                                 | \$ 33,968               | \$ 33,880              | \$ 88  | \$ 24,769                                   |  |
| 49 Sarah Lawrence            | \$ 71,175                                 | \$ 31,431               | \$ 36,760              | \$ (5,329)   | \$ 23,134                                   |  |
| Standard Dev                 | \$ 196,002                                | \$ 8,915                | \$ 3,094               | \$ 8,499   | \$ 4,052                                    |  |
| Median All 49                | \$ 262,722                                | \$ 40,471               | \$ 32,340              | \$ 7,128   | \$ 23,457                                   |  |
| Std Dev as % Med             | 74.60%                                    | 22.03%                  | 9.57%                  | 119.23%  | 17.27%                                      |  |
| Correl. With wealth          |   | 0.67                    | -0.07                  | 0.73   | -0.21                                       |  |
| AVG Wealthy 6                | \$ 745,046                                | \$ 54,232               | \$ 32,078              | \$ 22,153  | \$ 21,566                                   |  |
| Schools 7-49:                |   |                         |                        |  |   |  |
| Q1                           | \$ 325,047                                | \$ 41,718               | \$ 33,465              | \$ 13,412  | \$ 24,953                                   |  |
| Q2 (Median)                  | \$ 253,840                                | \$ 39,138               | \$ 32,277              | \$ 6,182   | \$ 23,421                                   |  |
| Q3                           | \$ 153,828                                | \$ 33,302               | \$ 30,225              | \$ 1,864   | \$ 21,319                                   |  |

Taken from Kaufman, Roger T. and Geoffrey Woglom, "Financial Change and Optimal Spending Rates Among Top Liberal Arts Colleges 1996-2001," *Review of Higher Education* 28.3 (2005): 339-368.

Grinnell College is at the top of the list with \$874,971 in net assets per full-time student, followed by Pomona, Swarthmore, Williams, Amherst, and Wellesley Colleges. The average among these wealthiest six colleges is \$745,046. The median value of net assets per student among the remaining 43 colleges is Oberlin College's \$253,840. With a modest spending rate of four percent to account for the fact that some of net assets are nonfinancial assets, the additional \$491,206 at the wealthiest six schools compared to Oberlin would give them an additional \$19,648 per student to spend each year!

In the second column we give an estimate of the total expenses per student at each school. We know that some of these numbers are misleading (e.g., Wellesley, Oberlin, and Middlebury College) because they include data for auxiliary enterprises. We included this category because some schools count expenses for room and board as auxiliary enterprises (as the instructions ask) while others count them as educational costs. Consequently, to make sure we treated all schools equally, we had to include all expenses. Nevertheless, we think most of the comparisons are useful. Expenses per student at the wealthiest six schools, even excluding Wellesley, were \$51,615, compared with a median at the remaining 43 LACs of \$39,138. It is important to note that these expenses do not include the full capital costs of using the immense amount of buildings and equipment. Instead, IPEDS expenses include the annual costs of operations and maintenance. As Winston and Lewis have illustrated, the full costs are considerably greater.<sup>4</sup>

Although there are substantial differences in expenses, the published comprehensive fees in the next column vary by much less. The comprehensive fee at the top six was \$32,078, which was actually less than the comprehensive fee at the median school among the remaining 43. It would be useful to have more systematic studies of how the leading schools, who are the price setters, set their tuition. My experience is that it is often government officials and trustees who restrain tuition increases.

In column four Woglom and I computed the subsidy per full-paying student by subtracting the published comprehensive fee,

which I often call the “sticker price,” from each institution’s total expenses per student. Since the wealthiest schools spend considerably more per student but don’t charge more, full paying students receive a much larger subsidy at the wealthiest schools, which are typically the highest-ranked schools. The subsidy for full-paying students is \$22,153 at the wealthiest six, but only \$6,182 for the median among the remaining 49. And at 10 of these medallion schools, expenses exceed the comprehensive fee by less than \$1,000.

Our estimates of the average net comprehensive fee for all students are given in column five. These, too, do not vary much among institutions. One can use these numbers to construct a median discount rate of 32.7 percent, but this is different from Lapovsky’s estimates in two ways. The base here is the comprehensive fee and not tuition and, secondly, the discount includes government as well as institutional financial aid.

The data in the next two columns were the focus of our research. Here we compute the average true or full institutional subsidy per student. These data represent the total amount each college spends per full-time student (again excluding most capital costs) minus the amount it receives from students and government. Since this subsidy comes from the financial funds of the college (and small amounts from private foundations) in the form of spending from the endowment or gifts to the alumni fund, we call it EXFF, or expenditures from financial funds. As column six illustrates, the wealthier schools give much greater institutional subsidies to the average student by spending considerably more and giving somewhat greater financial aid, as measured by discounts from published tuition. At the wealthiest six schools, EXFF per student is \$27,552, more than twice the subsidy at the median among the next 43, and more than three times the EXFF at 17 of these 43!

These data paint a somewhat different picture than that provided by Lapovsky and Breneman. Lapovsky finds no relationship between endowment size and discount rates. Although I would have preferred for her to use endowment per student rather than the total endowment, I get similar results for my estimates of the discount rates from the sticker price for the medallion LACs. Yet the true full

institutional subsidy as measured by EXFF per student is much *greater* among the more prestigious and wealthier colleges. These substantially larger subsidies may explain part of the reason applicants find these schools more desirable.

In the last column of the table we compute the total subsidy as a percentage of net assets. Although the amount of the subsidies at the wealthiest colleges is greater than elsewhere, their net assets are greater still. Consequently, EXFF as a percentage of net assets is considerably *smaller* at the wealthier institutions. This means that the wealthiest LACs are able to save a greater portion of their net assets each year. Consequently, their net assets will grow even faster than those of the other LACs in the future, thereby widening the gap between themselves and the other medallion and non-medallion schools.

In the rest of our paper we compute what we call the sustainable rates of spending and saving, given each institution's historical gift rates and a common rate of return on endowment. We find spending rates are sustainable under one common objective for endowments but a bit high under another. But for neither one are they calamitous, except at a few schools.

Before I conclude, I want to raise two more issues. Some people argue that LACs have trouble competing because public universities receive such large grants from state governments. However, in another paper, Woglom and I find that the wealthiest colleges receive substantial subsidies from the federal government in the form of what economists call tax expenditures. These represent the tax savings on gifts, endowment returns, and the ability to issue tax-exempt bonds. According to our preliminary calculations, the median federal subsidy among our 49 LACs is about \$7,500 per full-time student per year; the average subsidy among our wealthiest six colleges is \$15,880.

Finally, I personally think we need to confront more honestly the alarming decrease in the LACs' market share of higher education enrollees from about 65 percent in 1900, according to Breneman, to about two-to-three percent today. I share Lapovsky's and Breneman's concern about the future of the non-medallion LACs,

but even the wealthiest and most prestigious colleges that turn away many qualified applicants are selling their product to affluent families at far below cost. We must convince prospective students that a liberal arts education at a LAC is more valuable than one at a private university and a lot more valuable than one at a public university, even at an honors college within a public university.

I confess that I sometimes wonder. A while ago, I was shopping for two major purchases: a new car and a college for my son. Even though I know very little about cars myself, I was able to locate a large amount of very useful information on the Internet about the mechanics of each model, crash test results, depreciation, and detailed comments about performance and consumer satisfaction. Consequently, I feel comfortable that I am making a reasonably well-informed decision. On the other hand, I could not be as confident about the advice I gave my son, even though he had restricted his search to LACs in the Northeast and was primarily interested in economics and math, areas I should know. Of course, it may not have mattered in the end since my son doesn't pay too much attention to me anyway. But while I can easily find which schools have the most well-published economists, I do not know which have the best teachers and for some reason I trust the surveys of car owners more than the published surveys of students.

On every college tour my children and I have attended, at both LACs and universities, the tour guides proclaim that professors' prime focus is teaching, that they keep their office doors open, and they all genuinely want students to come see them anytime. But at every institution at which I have taught I know this is not true. Breneman writes, "faculty at LACs are selected and rewarded primarily for their ability as teachers." Again, this is not what I have observed. Indeed, the extrinsic rewards for truly excellent teaching at the most prestigious medallion LACs are all-too-often meager and occasionally perverse. Furthermore, while the *U.S. News and World Report* criteria may be inadequate, the LACs have restrained the dissemination of potentially more useful information, like that contained in the National Survey of Student Engagement.



I continue to believe that most students would benefit by going to a good liberal arts college, but we must prove our case. We must convince prospective applicants that a liberal arts education is both a good investment and a worthy pursuit. Families about to spend \$160,000 deserve no less.

## Notes

1. See for example Robert Zemsky's keynote address in "Academic Reforms in the World: Situation and Perspective in the Massification Stage of Higher Education (Reports of the 1997 Six-Nation Higher Education Project Seminar)," RIHE International Seminar Reports 10 (July 1997):1-28. <[http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat\\_Id=17](http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat_Id=17)>.
2. David W. Breneman, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?*(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), esp. ch.1, 1-19, and appendix A, 138-61.
3. This table is reprinted with permission from Roger T. Kaufman and Geoffrey Woglom, "Financial Changes and Optimal Spending Rates Among Top Liberal Arts Colleges," *The Review of Higher Education* 28.3 (2005): 339-368.
4. Gordon C. Winston and Ethan G. Lewis, "Physical Capital and Capital Service Costs in U.S. Colleges and Universities: 1993," *Eastern Economic Journal* 13.1 (1993): 13-36.

## Response

*Michael S. McPherson*

Lucie Lapovsky's and Roger Kaufman's essays are very informative and provocative. Perhaps the most useful thing I might add in response is an effort to embed their discussion of trends and issues in the world of liberal arts colleges (LACs) in a broader framework of higher education trends.

### **Private Higher Education**

First, I am reasonably confident that the trends Kaufman and Lapovsky describe among liberal arts colleges are mirrored in the larger world of private not-for-profit higher education. Here too the phenomenon of rising discount rates and intensifying competition for students noted by Lapovsky is present, and here too a pattern of growing stratification, like the one Kaufman identifies for LACs, is visible. A handful of the most richly endowed universities—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and a few others—are separating themselves from even the other leading privates. This changing competitive landscape is manifesting itself in several ways, one of which is an interesting change in the pricing structure at these “high end” institutions.

Echoing what Kaufman notes among LACs, it is no longer the case that the most prestigious and best endowed universities have the highest prices. Gordon Winston has developed this point in an illuminating way.<sup>1</sup> What these top institutions want is the very

“best” students, as conventionally measured, and they are willing to pay for them. They can afford to exercise price restraint for all students, and they can also afford to be very generous in their financial aid offers. Princeton led this charge through eliminating loans for all undergraduates, an act that has provoked a pattern of leapfrogging in aid arrangements among the wealthiest private universities and LACs, as they scramble to preserve or increase their yield of top-performing students. So far, this competition—fed of course by the pall the threat of antitrust prosecution has cast over cooperative agreements—has been limited almost completely to need-based aid, but there is no guarantee that even this element of restraint will be maintained.

This is especially the case because the aggressive pricing and aid expansion among these “hyper-elites” is putting increasing pressure on schools just a step down in the prestige ranks. Even schools as well-reputed and well-endowed as Cornell or Duke or, in the liberal arts college world, Wesleyan or Smith, can’t afford to compete with the across-the-board generosity of the Amhersts and Yales of the world. Yet they too place high value on competing for academic stars and other especially attractive students. The temptation to resort to merit aid to compete selectively with the top schools must be considerable—and of course the use of merit aid as a competitive weapon is nearly universally present in private higher education outside the elite ranks. Indeed, those high-ranking but not “hyper-elite” places that have not yet resorted to merit aid are feeling pressure both from the merit offers at places that rank below them and the increasingly generous policies of the top institutions. Given the intensity of competition, it is not hard to imagine a situation where substantial merit offers become part of the picture even at the very top institutions. And of course the excuse that can be offered by a leading college or university for abandoning the principle of basing all aid on need will be familiar from the playground: “He hit me first.”

It is an important and too little studied question whether this unrestrained drive to maximize student selectivity makes educa-

tional or social sense. Current trends will certainly increase the tendency noted by Cook and Frank to concentrate the very “best” students (as measured by high school qualifications and test scores) in a handful of elite institutions.<sup>2</sup> These students will also, on present trends in pricing and aid, wind up paying somewhat less for their educations than the slightly less than extremely well-qualified students at slightly less prestigious LACs and private universities. From an educational point of view, the result is a rather extreme form of “tracking,” and evidence from elementary and secondary education casts doubt on the educational advantages of that approach. From a social point of view, it is clear that students from more affluent backgrounds possess significant advantages in the competition for places at top institutions, advantages that range from strong high schools to expensive counseling and test preparation to opportunities for the kind of extracurricular achievements that score points in admissions offices. Reinforcing such social advantages at a time of growing economic inequality in the nation at large seems a dubious outcome at best.

To a large extent, individual colleges and universities are prisoners of the competitive situation in which they find themselves. As Kaufman notes, consumers lack good data on the educational quality of particular colleges and universities, and in the absence of such data they understandably resort to reputational indicators, of which the measurable quality of entering students is a prominent one. (As Kaufman also notes, colleges themselves contribute to this information vacuum when they are reluctant to share information that might be of real value for parents, including, for example, the findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement.) In this struggle to bid for the very best students, it’s very hard for individual colleges to “unilaterally disarm,” and collective agreements to disarm are blocked by the (in my view misguided) application of antitrust laws to financial aid practices.

There is one important thing that might be done by the “hyper-elites” to lessen the piling of advantage on advantage generated by current practices. This would be to provide an admissions

preference for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, analogous to that currently provided to athletes, legacies, and members of minority groups. This approach, advocated by William Bowen and colleagues in Bowen's Jefferson lectures and in a forthcoming book, has been styled "economic" affirmative action.<sup>3</sup> Until now, the main effort the hyper-elites have made to encourage the enrollment of these disadvantaged students is to reduce the net price by, for example, eliminating loans as an element of financial aid packages. The fact is, though, that a large fraction of low-income applicants to places like Harvard accept Harvard's offers of admission now, and the likelihood that the pool of applicants will be substantially widened by advertising a cheaper price is low.

If, on the other hand, schools like Harvard, Williams, and Stanford offered an admission advantage to low income applicants, the effect on the economic composition of the student body would be quite visible. Bowen reports that, in a sample of elite colleges and universities for which he has acquired extensive data, granting to students from the bottom quartile of the income distribution the same degree of advantage currently provided to the sons and daughters of alumni would change the share of students from that low income group from 11 percent to 17 percent.<sup>4</sup> A side-note about this type of policy is that it actually eases slightly the competitive pressures on the less wealthy colleges in the top group. When top universities bid more aggressively for low income students, they put pressure on pricing and aid strategies of their competitors. But if they offer admission to some low income students they currently turn down and, therefore, turn down some high income students they currently accept, some of those higher income students will wind up at the less prestigious colleges, helping their bottom lines.

### **Public Higher Education**

My remarks to this point focus on the tiny fraction of high school graduates who can realistically aspire to enrollment at one of the

“top” universities and colleges. In the larger world of higher education, which encompasses many of the students attending the hundreds of other self-styled private LACs in the nation, trends are quite different. For most American families contemplating higher education for their children, the most salient factors are, on one hand, the increasing economic importance of obtaining post secondary education and, on the other hand, the rapidly rising “sticker prices” at public colleges and universities.

These sticker price increases do not reflect mainly an increase in the costs of public higher education—in fact expenditures at public universities and colleges have been growing rather slowly—but rather a decrease in the willingness of state governments to subsidize public tuitions. Squeezed by strong resistance to tax increases and by growing demands for high priority expenditures, notably on Medicaid, the share of state resources devoted to higher education appropriations has shrunk.<sup>5</sup> Public universities and colleges have partially made up for the lagging contributions from state governments by raising tuitions, with the result that the share of public higher education revenues provided by families has grown from 18 percent in 1986 to 24 percent in the most recent available data.

Viewed narrowly, this run up in public tuitions may be “good news” for private LACs, at least in the near term. Many private LACs, especially outside the Northeast, compete heavily with good public universities in their region, and the rapid rise in tuitions at public universities narrows the price gap (which nonetheless remains large). At least as important, the fiscal squeeze may reduce the quality of the offerings at public universities, thereby shifting demand toward private universities.

This is, however, a very narrow way to look at this development. Even in competitive terms, greater reliance on tuition at public universities is not all good news for private universities. Greater reliance on tuition may lead public universities to pay more attention to their paying customers’ needs and wishes. Indeed, there is quite a bit of talk, much of it rather loose, in some public universities about “privatizing” their operations. It is pointed out that at some prominent public universities, the state government

contributes only a small fraction of total revenues, with the implication that the university should be largely independent of the state. These calculations, however, typically include both federally supported research and university hospital operations among the revenue streams, overlooking the fact that these activities are closely tied to matching expenditure streams. When it comes to undergraduate education, still a big item at almost all public colleges and universities, state appropriations continue to pay a large fraction of the bills. These institutions are still a long way from private. That said, the trend toward higher tuition, accompanied by more aggressive competition for paying students, is likely to continue, bringing mixed consequences for private competitors.

Far more important socially, the fiscal squeeze at public universities and colleges may have damaging consequences for the nation. For one thing, the great public universities are important conservators and developers of the nation's intellectual capital, and the threat to their work in graduate education and research, especially in areas that are not well-funded by the federal government, is real. It is also true that public higher education institutions, including importantly the community colleges, remain the point of entry to postsecondary education for most low-income and first generation college students. Despite the high economic returns of a college education, the rate of college-going among American high school graduates has stagnated now for about a decade, even as it continues to rise in other countries. Certainly one factor contributing to this result is the difficulty disadvantaged young people face in paying for college, as tuitions rise and financial aid fails to keep up. Looking toward the future, large and growing federal deficits and continued fiscal pressure on state governments suggest that these economic impediments facing disadvantaged students are unlikely to ease and may well increase. Private universities and colleges, with the exception of a handful of the most affluent places catering to the most highly qualified students, are in no position to take up the slack. The competitive trends cited by both Lapovsky and Kaufman make the prospect of greater outreach to disadvantaged students even more elusive.

## Conclusion

We live in a time of considerable economic challenge not only for private liberal arts colleges but for higher education generally. If misery loves company, then the liberal arts colleges should be relieved that they are not alone. More constructively, the generality of the plight may encourage us to think about how different segments of the higher education community might work together to promote a more promising future for the industry and for society.

## Notes

1. Gordon C. Winston and David J. Zimmerman, "Where is Aggressive Price Competition Taking Higher Education?" *Change* 32.4 (July/August 2000): 10-17.
2. Philip J. Cook and Robert Frank, "The Growing Concentration of Top Students at Elite Schools" in *Studies of Supply and Demand in Higher Education*, ed. Charles Clotfelter and Michael Rothschild (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 121-40.
3. William G. Bowen, "The Quest for Equity: 'Class' (Socio-Economic Status) in American Higher Education," the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, lecture 2, April 7, 2004, November 27, 2004 <<http://www.mellon.org/questforequity.pdf>>; William G. Bowen et al., *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* (University of Virginia Press, 2005).
4. Bowen, "The Quest for Equity: 'Class' (Socio-Economic Status) in American Higher Education."
5. Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, "Funding Roller Coaster for Public Higher Education," *Science Magazine*, November 14, 2003: 1157.



**II. THE PRESENT:**  
**TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

**Scholars and Teachers Revisited:  
In Continued Defense of College Faculty Who Publish**

*Robert A. McCaughey*

**Autobiographical Prologue**

A dozen years back, while serving as dean of faculty at Barnard College, Columbia University, I was asked by my president and trustees a question for which I had no ready answer. To wit: *How much did Barnard faculty publish?* Unasked at the time, but inferable was a second: *If Barnard faculty did publish a lot, to what institutional end?*

The question was asked in a context that indicated that more than mere curiosity prompted it. Some faculty were pressing for an increase in the faculty research and travel funds; others were urging a reduction in teaching programs to facilitate such research and research-related travel; still others expressed concern about the pressure on junior faculty to publish. At the same time, some economy-minded trustees wondered just below audible level about the institutional return on funds expended to support faculty research, faculty travel, research leaves, and sabbaticals (here they were abetted by a larger public discussion about the so-called “flight from the classroom”), while others worried that we might be losing our most promising teachers to the unreasonable demands of a tenure process that subscribed to the “publish or perish” dictum.

I was familiar with the late 1960s and 1970s research findings of Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., and Seymour Martin Lipset that indicated that college faculty published very little and felt the better for it.<sup>1</sup>

These findings had been given new life in the mid-1980s by “troubled friends of the college,” most notably Ernest L. Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who worried over the prospect of college faculty going the way of the university in emphasizing their research opportunities over their teaching responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> And all of us—Barnard faculty, trustees, administrators and students—interpreted the question as part of the perennial local one of whether our singular relationship with Columbia, which gave Columbia the final say on the tenuring of Barnard faculty, was a bane or a blessing.<sup>3</sup>

### **Down the Rabbit Hole**

My first response was to recast the local question into a more broadly applicable null hypothesis: *Liberal arts college faculty have no ongoing trans-institutional scholarly lives, but only local teaching and collegial lives; the scholarly lives that they may have once had ended with the completion of their doctoral studies, their acceptance of faculty appointments at a college and the brief flurry of publishing (if any) required to secure them tenure.*

My second was to limit my target group to college faculty in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>4</sup> Besides greater manageability, two other considerations prompted this exclusion of science faculty: I was at the time prepared to concede that the differences between “doing science” at even a well-equipped college and a research university were such to constitute a qualitative difference, which in turn allowed the view that the function of college science faculty was fundamentally different from that of their university counterparts. I also believed research conducted by the then Oberlin College provost Sam C. Carrier in the late 1970s had already persuasively made the case, without challenging the notion of the qualitative distinctiveness of university and college science, for supporting scientific research at liberal arts colleges.<sup>5</sup>

I then made two operational decisions to permit testing of the null hypothesis, although at the cost of opening the exercise up to legitimate complaints of reductiveness. The first was to define a scholarly life for present purposes in terms of publishing activity.

That is, lots of recent publications (and citations thereto) constituted a flourishing and ongoing scholarly life; few or no recent publications (or citations thereto) a languishing or non-existent scholarly life. This was not to discount other activities that characterize a scholarly life, such as a reflective disposition, conference-going, paper-giving and peer recognitions, but to suggest that such indicators are even harder to measure than publications and citations and usually accompany and/or follow on publishing activity. The second was to define the quantitative threshold for a scholarly life to be publishing at a rate typical of a tenured member of a research university department in the humanities and social sciences.

The task then became to compare publication/citation rates of individual college faculty in a given discipline with the rate of a collective norm of their discipline-specific university counterparts. Unlike the studies by Ladd and Lipset, which used aggregate self-reported data gathered from national surveys of the hundreds of liberal arts colleges, I did my own counting and limited my colleges to those where there was a high prospect of finding publishing faculty, colleges, I complacently assured myself, much like my own. My first sampling was limited to tenured members in the humanities and social sciences at eight liberal arts colleges, where I had personal contacts and/or some expectation that their faculty contained active publishers. It was subsequently broadened to 24 colleges, all of whom were classified by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as “Select Liberal Arts Colleges” and all of whom numbered among the top-ranked colleges by *U.S. News and World Report*. They included:

|            |             |             |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Amherst*   | Barnard*    | Beloit      |
| Bowdoin    | Bryn Mawr*  | Carleton*   |
| Colgate    | Davidson    | Grinnell    |
| Haverford  | Hobart      | Knox        |
| Lawrence   | Middlebury  | Mt. Holyoke |
| Oberlin*   | Pomona      | Reed        |
| Smith*     | Swarthmore* | Vassar      |
| Wellesley* | Wesleyan    | Williams    |

\*part of original eight-college sample

The mean scholarly productivity indices of research university faculty for the 12 disciplines were to be constructed from the tenured faculty at four research universities—Columbia, Princeton, Yale, and Cornell. What followed was a discipline-by-discipline count of scholarly publications (books and articles) and citations of some 2,000 faculty at 24 colleges and four universities.

The results, published in 1994,<sup>6</sup> suggested that many senior faculty at leading liberal arts colleges publish (and are cited) at rates approaching the mean level of publishing among their university peers, while a few exceeded it. A half dozen colleges had several departments whose senior members published at rates approaching department-specific university norms. To be sure, this was not true of all 24 colleges in the study, and even at colleges with the highest institutional levels of publication, a few faculty within individual departments often accounted for much of the total productivity. Still, at nearly all the colleges surveyed there existed a cadre of faculty whose scholarly productivity approached that of university departments. To be sure, some of these faculty might well migrate to a research university, but many would not and all, as college faculty, were leading the kinds of scholarly lives and in sufficient numbers to refute the study's null hypothesis that scholarly college faculty was an oxymoron.

### **Among Friends**

Having settled, at least to my satisfaction, the posited question of whether faculty at two dozen liberal arts colleges participate in the scholarly life of their academic disciplines in the affirmative, and finding Barnard faculty up there with the best of them, I then found myself wondering what accounted for the differences among and within the sampled colleges. Here two other research techniques were called upon: focused interviews with deans of faculty, whose responsibilities included the care and feeding of faculty; and a targeted survey of faculty whose scholarly indices (and dean's assessment) placed them among the most active publishers on their campuses, aka "scribblers," and a smaller sampling of faculty whose

scholarly indices indicated little or no ongoing publishing activity, aka “abstainers.”<sup>7</sup>

The deans were asked about existing institutional incentives/disincentives with respect to the scholarly activity of faculty, the weight publications played in the tenure process, and whether post-tenure publishing activity figured in promotion, leave and salary considerations. Important inter-institutional differences emerged, which correlated well enough with institutional indices of productivity to allow me at least to speculate on the ways administrations communicate to their faculty whether post-tenure scholarly activity really matters.<sup>8</sup>

Getting deans who had never undertaken to rank their faculty by scholarly productivity for internal purposes to volunteer to do so for the benefit of an outsider’s research project was too much to ask. But provided with a fellow dean’s discipline-by-discipline rank ordering of their faculty based on publications/citations counts, most were quite willing to comment on the provided relative ranking, to offer an exculpatory explanation here, an anecdotal reinforcement there. More negotiation eventually produced a jointly arrived-at list of faculty arrayed along a publishing-activity continuum.

The upshot of these 22-question surveys, to which 745 faculty responded (a 45 percent response rate), was both a confirmation of the means of identifying “scribblers”—only a handful of respondents demurred when being so classified—and provided a look at institutional circumstances from the perspective of self-identified scribblers. By and large, faculty respondents confirmed the views expressed by their deans as to their standing within the college community and made many of the same suggestions for assisting faculty committed to sustaining their scholarly lives through publishing and extra-institutional disciplinary engagements. In general, where “scribblers” were either an institutional or departmental commonplace, the responses bespoke considerable self-confidence; where they were less so, a degree of professional beleagueredness. Most expressed satisfaction with their institutional circumstances, even as they acknowledged a degree of latent mobility. When asked

whether they would consider accepting a research university appointment, one cagily responded, “Never say never.”

### **How New? How Come?**

Interviews with deans, faculty survey responses, and two dozen follow-up interviews with faculty respondents allowed me at least to speculate on two questions that went beyond my original charge: Is the phenomenon of the presence of a substantial number of faculty scribblers at liberal arts colleges a recent development? To the extent that it is, what brought it about?

Considerable unanimity existed among deans and faculty (scribblers or no) at previously all-male colleges in the institutional survey that the coming of women to campus—as students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and as faculty in numbers thereafter—proved to be transformative in many ways, not least in what was expected of faculty who were expected to come and stay on at one of these colleges. The traditional “old boys network” that had long supplied these colleges with male faculty exclusively was no longer equal to the recruitment needs of these faculties, to say nothing of being outlawed. In its place came a more impersonal meritocratic system of faculty appointments and promotions, one in which publications and professional extra-institutional engagements meant much more than they had earlier.

Among the persistent women’s colleges in the sample, where some women faculty had earlier operated at university levels of publication but with no prospects of being recruited away, the changes wrought by co-education elsewhere and affirmative action nationwide were only slightly less transformative. The shift from having their pick of women academics to having to compete for their services with Amherst and Williams (to say nothing of Princeton and Yale) brought about important modifications in the recruitment and promotion strategies of these women’s colleges. As an Amherst male faculty member characterized the impact of the arrival of women faculty on his campus in the 1970s, it had the effect of “turning things around generally.”

The then two-decade long surplus of Ph.D.s looking for academic positions only reinforced the trumping characteristic of publications over local standing and social compatibility. The often protracted experience of many Ph.D.s on the academic job market was one in which the importance of publications and scholarly contacts became a lesson hard learned.

### **But Can They Teach?**

I should perhaps have stopped here, having settled in my own mind that scholarly lives were being successfully and more or less enthusiastically pursued by faculty at liberal arts colleges, that colleges could do things to encourage such lives, and that Barnard, while subject to local considerations (read “Columbia”), was experiencing in only a slightly more intense form several late 20th-century phenomena that had quietly transformed the working lives of faculty at other leading liberal arts colleges. That I did not stop here followed on early reactions by trustees (and parents) to the answers I offered to the question I thought they had asked. What they wanted to know now—had really wanted to know all along—was what, if anything, did the fact that one faculty member was a “scribbler” and another a “contemplative” have to do with either meeting her/his core responsibility in the classroom? Could “scribblers” teach any better than “abstainers,” or were they, as several commentators have been arguing since William J. Bennett and Lynne V. Cheney took up the issue in the early 1980s, getting on with their scholarly lives by neglecting their students?<sup>9</sup> As young George Washington acknowledged when confronted with the recently hatcheted cherry tree, this was a tough question.

It also turned out to be a question for which there is very little solid information. Most of the sample colleges had mechanisms for assessing/evaluating individual teaching effectiveness, but few of them lent themselves to college-wide or even departmental comparisons, much less inter-institutional ones. And much of what passed for teaching evaluation in the course of our respective tenure processes was anecdotal and highly subjective. Even those colleges that administered faculty-wide student evaluations of faculty were



reluctant to make them available to an outsider, particularly when on several of these campuses such evaluations were viewed as “for the instructor’s eyes only.” Student-produced evaluations were available on some campuses, but here too their standing among faculty made reliance upon them locally suspect.

Faced with this paucity of data on teaching effectiveness of individual faculty, I fell back on my interviews with deans and targeted faculty questionnaires. Deans were asked to categorize a sampling of faculty into five ascending categories of teaching effectiveness, from “outstanding” (5) to “relatively ineffective” (1). I then collapsed the top and bottom two rankings, changed the (3)s to (2)s and normalized the ranking to get equal numbers in each of three categories. A similar procedure was performed on the scholarly rankings, using institutional rather than disciplinary scores. In the end, 19 of the 24 colleges in the survey provided usable teaching ratings on 575 of their faculty.<sup>10</sup>

The resultant two-dimensional table allowed four composite identities:

|   |
|---|
| High scholarly index/High teaching index—“Scholar-Teachers” |
| High scholarly index/Low teaching index—“Scholars”          |
| High teaching index/Low scholarly index—“Teachers”          |
| Low teaching index/Low scholarly index—“Neither”            |

The results proved quite gratifying to those who doubt the dichotomous character of the scholarly and teaching functions. Faculty with high scholarly indices more often ranked among “outstanding” (5) or “highly effective” (4) teachers than “less effective” (2) or “ineffective” (1) teachers, and did so with frequencies that were statistically significant. Correspondingly, faculty with low scholarly indices were no more likely to be rated as “effective” teachers than “ineffective” ones. Indeed, the two most common designations to emerge from the pairing of characteristics were “Scholar-Teacher” and “Neither.” Among top liberal arts

college faculty at least, the baseball label “good field, no hit” has little in the way of functional equivalence.<sup>11</sup>

A final and quite unexpected bonus from my brief foray into the murky region of teaching evaluations: some evidence to suggest that the positive connection between scholarly activity and teaching effectiveness is strongest among older college faculty. This at least allows the cheering inference that teaching effectiveness is sustained by scholarly activity, a belief frequently asserted by my scribbling survey respondents. To the extent that this is true, it provides a powerful and practical argument for why college trustees, foundations, and governmental agencies should support the scholarly activities of their faculty, and why parents and students, rightly and primarily concerned with the instructional quality of our colleges, should applaud their doing so: Scribbling keeps the teaching juices flowing. But then you likely already knew that.

### Notes

1. Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., “The Work Experience of American College Professors: Some Data and an Argument,” *Current Issues in Higher Education* 2 (1979): 3-12; Ladd and Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Ladd-Lipset Survey,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 13, 1975 to January 19, 1976.
2. Ernest L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.)
3. For the local context, see Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754–2004* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 568-72.
4. The 10 departments considered: art history, classics, English, philosophy, religion, anthropology, economics, history, political science, sociology.
5. David Davis-Van Atta, Sam C. Carrier, and Frank Frankfort, *Educating America's Scientists: The Role of the Research Colleges* (Oberlin, Ohio: Office of the Provost, Oberlin College, 1985).

6. Robert A. McCaughey, *Scholars and Teachers: The Faculties of Select Liberal Arts Colleges and Their Place in American Higher Learning* (New York: Barnard College, 1994).
7. The disparity of the samples followed on the urging of several cooperating deans that I only survey their “scribblers,” lest the “abstainers” infer decanal snooping. The labeling was my lame attempt at objectivity.
8. McCaughey, *Scholars and Teachers*, chapter 3.
9. William J. Bennett, *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1984); Lynne V. Cheney, *Tyrannical Machines: A Report on Educational Practices Gone Wrong and Our Best Hopes for Setting Them Right* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1990).
10. Robert A. McCaughey, “But Can They Teach? In Praise of College Professors Who Publish,” *Teachers College Record* 95 (Winter 1993): 242-257.
11. McCaughey, *Scholars and Teachers*, 102-104, table on 114.

## Beyond the Circle: Challenges and Opportunities for the Contemporary Liberal Arts Teacher-Scholar

*Kimberly Benston*

There are, I think, two decisive institutional elements of our current circumstances as liberal arts scholar-teachers: first, growing similarity, both intellectual and bureaucratic, between the liberal arts college (more exactly for our purposes, the so-called “select” liberal arts college, or SLAC) and the so-called first-tier research university, a development most precisely chronicled by my fellow panelist, Robert McCaughey;<sup>1</sup> and second, increasing dynamism between the liberal arts college and the public sphere. Every essential feature of our professional identities as agents of scholarly, intellectual, curricular, and institutional missions has been altered in recent decades—and most dramatically in the past decade—by this double gravitation of the SLAC toward arenas that are, I will assert, markedly more complex and less coherent than the superseded liberal arts hermitage, and that, moreover, suffer between them an increasingly vexed relation. As we have grown in purposive complexity, so have we thrived, becoming, as McCaughey has argued, increasingly meritocratic, pluralistic, and just plain interesting; but as we have mimed the modern university’s drift toward internal fragmentation and corporate simulation, we have courted a disquieting, and disabling, incoherence. Even so, for reasons that my other fellow panelist, Kenneth Ruscio, has thoughtfully identified and that I believe McCaughey’s research affirms, there remains great potential for the liberal arts college to fashion an intelligible and cogent mode of teacher-scholar that navigates the

Scylla of the modern university's muddled mission and the Charybdis of a fractious public sphere.

To move toward that revised vocational model—or, at least, toward a strategy for its realization—let's first look more precisely at each of these domains, the university and the public sphere,<sup>2</sup> in order both to describe better our current state and to suggest how it might best be addressed. From its inception, the modern university has sought to harmonize discrete intellectual pursuits with the comprehensiveness—the *universality*—of their shared claims to truth and purpose, resolving what Schelling called the “confused mass” of individuated impressions and facts into “the living whole of knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Even as the intensifying command of science, technology, disciplinary demarcation, and bureaucratic administration within the university loosened the fabric of concerns binding the professoriate to a sense of common purpose, the ideal of synthetic reflection underwriting Schelling's idea of a university persisted in the form of a constellation of mutually reinforced idealizations: nation, culture, and—subtending, or suffusing, these, sometimes furtively, sometimes with self-congratulatory fanfare—“the human.”<sup>4</sup> But as we are all aware—and doubtless as some of us have partly celebrated—such constructs as nation, culture, and the human have in recent times been decentered by many converging forces: multiculturalism; post-foundational epistemologies; the explosion of information wrought by technological and economic development; the infection of educational discourse by “market” idioms; and escalating emphases on both global and local expressions of citizenship, emphases both magnified and refigured by 9/11 and its continuing aftermath. Deprived of these enabling myths, the university—that is, the university considered as an *institution* (for I do not speak here of its many brilliant denizens who are themselves striving to redefine the university's disposition in this age of demystification)—finds itself incapable of providing an account of itself that is fully persuasive either to its internal constituents or external audiences.

Among those dislocating forces that estrange the university from self-elucidating voice, none is more powerful than its ever-increasing

deference to market dictates and the discourses of “accounting” and “evaluation” that prove so corrosive to an encompassing account of value. If the complaint of the university’s pollution by mercantile influences extends at least from Thorstein Veblen to Bill Readings and Mary Poovey,<sup>5</sup> those fearful Cassandras have not stemmed the university’s rush to compartmentalize, monetarize, and privatize intellectual activity, bracketing complex questions of judgment in favor of an often cramped, expedient, yet ironically tenuous imitation of corporate methods and consumerist manners. Unmoored from now-discredited transcendental justification, the university becomes a project defined by pervasively materialist logic, a logic at once circular and aimless (conflating or confusing, as Poovey observes, means and ends),<sup>6</sup> a kind of parodic inversion of the liberal arts pursuit that Cardinal Newman memorably described as “self-sufficient and complete . . . [capable of] stand[ing] on its own pretensions.”<sup>7</sup>

I will not speak for my university-based colleagues’ sense of vocation under the aegis of this corporatized university, though the measurably widening divisions there between permanent and transient faculty, between humanists and scientists, and between faculty and administrators—whether assessed, on the one hand, in terms of prestige, power, and resources, or, on the other hand, as a matter of serious, respectful exchange—suggests that David Damrosch’s colorful, if extreme, vision of the university as a space of “alienation and aggression” may, sadly, adumbrate the current framework of self-realization for the university-based professoriate.<sup>8</sup> But it will not be enough, or even appropriate, for us to advert to those sententiae describing the liberal arts mission as inherently and self-sufficiently dignifying that Newman so eloquently wrought and that we often still find promoted in somewhat diluted forms by college mission statements. For those once-satisfying ideals—suitable of course to a society capable of affirming the transcendental value of culture—fashioned the liberal arts teacher as an exile from vulgarity, alternately dour, dreamy, or ditsy in his or her detachment from what John Stuart Mill, crafting a vision of education as the “forming of great minds,” called “the business of

the world.”<sup>9</sup> We have arrived at a point where such detachment defuses rather than sparks a productively critical relation either to the global enterprise of emancipation or the local project of self-transformation. Charting instead a path between the ideological reductions of defunct myth and debasing materialism, the liberal arts educator is today called upon not only to compose a counterpoint of specialty and generality (thus renovating Schelling), and to entwine enrichment and engagement (thus reorienting Newman), but to reimagine the scholar-teacher’s dialogue with the public sphere as a mutual quest for worth, not wealth, tested by evolving accounts of value, not essentializing accounting procedures. To invigorate the liberal arts mission, and thus to mitigate the disabling constraints and contradictions accrued in our movement toward the university model of professional identity, we would do well to explore, sharpen, and foster constructs of knowledge and teaching that refine the now-inescapable intimacy of the academic arena and public sphere.

Both domains—the classroom and the civic square—are at stake here, for both equally face the threat not only of being saturated, indeed engulfed, by market forces (with their insidious effect of incapacitating critique by internalizing it as stylistic adornment), but also of finding their own exploratory voices displaced into scripts authored by others. Even at the liberal arts college, faculty, and students, like the mass of our fellow citizens laboring (as Nora Watson famously put it to Studs Terkel) “in jobs that are too small for our spirits,”<sup>10</sup> confront the sensation of being aliens within their own institutions at those moments when some legitimating element of our neighbor’s or colleague’s identity—knowledge, renown, mobility—seems either a widget in an economy of power or an unobtainable and untranslatable sacrament sheltered from communal transaction. When, for example, we already take for granted the nature and aims of whatever we think of as “knowledge,” and particularly when such norms prove incapable of acknowledging what cannot be subsumed under their authority, then our positions, however hard-won, have become impediments, not incitements, to personal and collective development, mere

commodities in the economy of academic prestige. In my view, the reformation of the liberal arts faculty role (or, at least, self-conception) consequent to the SLAC's convergence with the research university—that is, from pastoral mentor mediating for students received knowledge to scholar-teacher working at the frontline of knowledge production—has, for all its indisputable benefits, left us too often uncertain in just this way about our position *vis*each other and *vis*the Other (that imagined source of value, purpose, meaning that links our work to a world “beyond”) as it speaks through various public personae. By the same token, I think that the very habit of shared self-scrutiny that this transformation has instilled in us makes us eminently capable of productively rethinking our relation to knowledge precisely as a positional drama, a drama affecting our roles both within and beyond our institutions.

What might this positional drama look like? Recently, my students and I encountered a passage that offers remarkable resonance with that question. Here is Frederick Douglass elucidating in his *Narrative* of 1845 the meaning of slave songs, or rather, his relation to the possibilities of such meaning:

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance . . . while on their way would make the dense old woods . . . reverberate with their wild songs . . . I did not, when a slave understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek.<sup>11</sup>

Douglass's explication of slave songs does much more than defend vernacular—or local—performance against alien appro-



priation or denial; the passage dramatizes a complex movement of identifications and dislocations as the songs' "meaning" and the author's interpretive legitimacy reconfigure each other in a continuous process of renegotiation. His claim to interpretive authority depends upon his concurrent location beyond *and* within the scene he simultaneously recuperates and resignifies. The emergence of that authority from a confluence of interpretive and experiential perspectives—focused in the multiple roles of boy, cultural traveler, and narrator, and in the passage's oscillating tenses—suggests a constantly shifting critical consciousness. Douglass's complex reflection on slave songs thereby provides the insight that social performance and its interpretation together comprise a defining but provisional transaction, having neither predetermined form nor final significance. Correspondingly, the position of Douglass's "I" is not that of an absolved overseer of the cultural text, an independent and steady node of awareness, but an engaged and implicated witness, occupying the place where the vicissitudes and jagged continuities of communal self-interrogation crystallize through expressive enactment ("while I am writing these lines . . ."). Site prods insight, as the ideal of a singular perceiving being gives way to the author's recognition of his evolving identity in a continuous recognition of plural and contingent meanings.

I have permitted myself this excursus not simply to embellish my presentation with Douglass's eloquence, but indeed because his text exemplifies so keenly how interpretive insight and self-narration can emerge from a self-conscious negotiation of distance and engagement, a negotiation that is at once hermeneutic and experiential. That process, we should note, is irreducible to any construct of foundation, code, or even determinate history or ideology, and its aim likewise cannot be assimilated to any prescription for social action. In taking Douglass as an exemplar for the liberal arts scholar-teacher as public intellectual, I envision us moving with agility and self-awareness between the poles of unreflective phenomenism and eviscerating abstraction—moving, too, between different "circles" of association and authorization, simultaneously legitimizing and interrogating both the liberal arts setting and the

wider public sphere as loci of “meaning.” In this way, for both domains we will not foreclose but instead foreground the question of institutional and individual purpose, taking these neither as mere instruments for self-advancement nor as unquestioned ways of life.

I am tempted at this point to disavow any definitive blueprint of social mission for the liberal arts college as such. Indeed, the history of the modern university, whether in Schelling’s Germany, Mill’s England, or Reading’s America, teaches us the limits and dangers of asking educational institutions to undertake projects of social engineering guided by idealist meta-narratives. But we liberal arts practitioners cannot simply swaddle ourselves in shibboleths about the apolitical quest for “truth,” admonishing ourselves, in Stanley Fish’s recent words, not to “confuse [our] academic obligations with the obligation to save the world.”<sup>12</sup> For even to heed Fish’s accompanying caution against “surrender [of our] academic obligations to the agenda of any nonacademic constituency,” we cannot remain inert in the face of mounting corporate and governmental efforts to shape our educational mission. Douglass’s example suggests, in fact, the wisdom of neither isolating inquiry from the social conditions in which our institutions are embedded nor subjugating inquiry to externally stipulated imperatives.

The need for contemporary teacher-scholars to actively defend, rather than complacently assume, the social conditions that enable our rightly celebrated mandate to pursue “the true task of academic work: the search for truth and the dissemination of it through teaching” (Fish) dramatically challenges any vision of the liberal arts arena as a place apart from public exchange. Of particularly grave and pressing concern for today’s and tomorrow’s liberal arts educator are the many post-9/11 legislative, regulative, and law enforcement assaults against free inquiry that have registered upon academia with increasing frequency and precision since passage of HR 3162, the so-called USA Patriot Act, in October, 2001. A cursory cross-section of implications and effects of the Patriot Act and related legislation for contemporary scholar-teachers might include the following:

- Sections 216-218 of the Patriot Act provide for unrestricted government spying on communications, including email, without need of court order so long as “the information likely to be obtained . . . is relevant to an ongoing criminal investigation.” In a circularity worthy of “Orwellian” imagination, such “criminal investigation” need merely involve the authorities’ suspicion or disapproval of on-campus speech, as per a federal judge’s order that organizers of a Drake University forum on the Iraq War conducted in November, 2003 divulge records of the event to federal prosecutors. (Only after a sustained struggle against the court order waged by the National Lawyers Guild was the subpoena [and an accompanying gag order] withdrawn by the U.S. Attorney for the southern district of Iowa . . . leaving intact the judicial sanction for prosecutorial intimidation by federal authorities.)
- Sections 213-215 of the Patriot Act extend to the federal government extraordinary, unchecked access to a variety of private documents, including educational and library records. Under these provisions, librarians can be forced to make accessible to law enforcement agents records of patrons’ reading, while facing criminal prosecution for informing anyone of their cooperation with these authorized intrusions on the free pursuit of information. In addition to circulation records, authorities, operating under the FBI’s “Library Awareness Program,” now have the right to monitor online library use.
- Operating under such post-9/11 legislation as the Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act, the National Security Entrance-Exit Registration System, the Border Security Act, and the Homeland

Security Act, the FBI, INS, and Justice Department have delayed, detained, and/or refused entry to thousands of foreign students and scores of foreign scholars seeking entry to the United States in order to pursue study and research with their American colleagues. Projects involving such subjects as HIV treatment, development of a vaccine for the West Nile virus, cause and cure for leukemia, theoretical physics, meteorological analysis, and—ironically enough—detection of bio-warfare agents have been stalled or ruined by such government interventions, none of which have come with public explanations affording visiting scholars or their hosts opportunity for response.<sup>13</sup>

- According to a report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, dozens of colleges and universities have entered into partnerships with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces, "assigning campus-police officers to cooperate" in federal investigations (often targeting foreign nationals), thereby creating a depressing effect on the free movement of individuals and information.<sup>14</sup>
- The currently proposed extension of the Patriot Act ("Patriot Act II") licenses the government to secretly incarcerate, deport, and strip citizenship from anyone who supports an activity deemed "terrorist" by the Attorney General. Such activities may be themselves currently legal, and might easily include advocacy of causes felt to be inhospitable to the Attorney General's perceived interests.

This enumeration of incursions on intellectual exchange (and I hasten to note that the list of mechanisms designed to chill discourse and curtail diversity on American campuses could be vastly extended) vividly illustrates the need for every faculty member to understand actively the relation between individual scholarly

and pedagogical pursuits and the radiating spheres of public life that can either enrich or threaten our shared “search for truth.” Notably, it is not just the liberal arts institution but also those encompassing publics that depend upon our ability to enter productively into a public conversation about the value and welfare of our institutional practices. And it has been the burden of my Douglass-inspired argument that our ability not merely to engage but to help preserve and refine the public sphere depends upon our reconception of the scholar-teacher as something other than just, on the one hand, erudite specialist or pastoral sage at home in a quasi-feudal retreat, or, on the other hand, technocratic expert molded to the “modernized,” instrumentalized, and marketed university.

Such a project might provide a means of reintegrating the diversified functions of faculty life so as to yield for us the same integrity of identity and purpose that we tell students will be the legacy of *their* liberal arts experience. If this scenario has merit, then a consequent revisionary account of the emergent “teacher-scholar” casts the liberal arts college itself in a somewhat new light: we might find ourselves diverging from the recent imitative path through which our values and aims derive from the research university model, revisiting hiring expectations and legitimation protocols accordingly; but more: we might allow ourselves to assert the “select” liberal arts institutions as being themselves the *vanguard model* for intellectual and pedagogical work in the academy, as we are today *best* positioned to craft innovative, effective models of vocation by dint of size, a distinctive blend of older and more recent habits of scholarly development and curricular organization, and a long-nurtured habit of asking alongside our students just exactly the foregoing questions about the place of knowledge and learning in the enveloping public sphere.

Thus by way of moving toward concluding recommendations, I turn to the work of Kenneth Ruscio, who, in a widely influential essay pointedly titled “The *Distinctive* Scholarship of the Selective Liberal Arts College,”<sup>15</sup> envisioned us nimbly moving among disparate forms of knowledge and differing communities of under-

standing to forge innovative professional identities. That vision, now a decade-and-a-half old, remains bracing, but perhaps also undernourished, so I close by taking up its hope and challenge—a call to vitalize liberal arts faculty experience so as to ensure SLAC prominence within American higher education—by suggesting a few key areas for scrutiny within our own institutional practices:

1. Vigorous discussion of the role of public intellectual work as a feature of vocational legitimacy. We are indebted, of course, to Ernest Boyer's seminal provocation to widen the parameters of what counts as "scholarship," but Boyer cedes too much in creating a "fourfold" definition that distinguishes, for example, the "knowledge of discovery" from the "knowledge of integration."<sup>16</sup> Rather, following McCaughey and Ruscio, I urge us to reconsider, not just broaden, received categories, specifically deconstructing the specialized and the applied, and to reconsider the place of public knowledge and collaborative inquiry in our hiring and promotion processes.
2. Careful reconsideration of existing curricular structures, including the role of old departmental and divisional rubrics and new scholarly and curricular entities (e.g., the ever-mushrooming "centers" of various sorts), carried out within a discussion of our encompassing educational mission. Notably, despite their faculties' extensive contributions to reconsideration of disciplinary formations, research universities have little changed their intellectual and curricular structures; departments increasingly serve more as bureaucratic districts than intellectual regions, but universities tend more to add on new "program" structures along the margins of entrenched "departmental" zones than to revisit presiding curricular designs. Can SLACs' very limitations of size and resources, as well as the history

of cross-pollination cited by Ruscio, yield more creative adaptations? And can our burgeoning centers likewise operate not as supplements to (or, worse, retreats from) our “normal” scholarly and curricular activities, but instead as incubators of ideas that will ultimately reform existing structures from within?

3. Spirited intellectual exchange across curricular divisions—particularly between scientists and non-scientists—about essential features of scholarly pursuit and their relation to the encompassing liberal arts mission. As humanists, we might begin by asking about the conflict of “scientism” and “interpretation” in our own fields; as scientists, we might ask how a rhetoric, philosophy, and history of science might infiltrate our theories of knowledge: and from there, we might together make clearer what epistemological and pedagogical assumptions we can and cannot share.
4. Clarification of the place of market forces within our scholarly, pedagogical, and administrative activities (including the propriety of patenting knowledge and selling course design, trends that seriously threaten our fundamental culture of intellectual and pedagogical exchange).
5. Vigilance against encroaching divisions of labor within the liberal arts college, which separate “program” from “service” teaching, and tenure-track from adjunct faculty.
6. Broad consideration of the aims and limits of fast-growing information technologies, about which we collectively understand little more than that they are putting extraordinary strain on educational resources.

7. Careful focus on the growing prominence of athletics within the SLACs—heeding the warnings and recommendations offered by William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin in *Reclaiming the Game*<sup>17</sup>—with special attention to recruitment practices, admissions procedures, financial aid patterns, and the extension of seasons in the pursuit of non-league championships.

And, finally:

8. If only for its symbolic value (not in what it signifies to external audiences, but rather, for what we can remind ourselves about our fundamental mission): reconsideration of SLAC's participation in the college-rating game, particularly (but not only) the contest run by *U.S. News and World Report*. Nothing so misshapes our professional identities, so distracts us from refurbishing our institutional missions, and, on the other hand, so reinforces the pressure to conform to others' narrations of our venture, as the confusion of "telling our story" with *imprinting our brand* caused by the rankings' status-wars. Contemplating the gift of time, focus, and imagination that refusal of the ranking game would bestow upon us, and with it the opportunity to take full responsibility for a continuous self-account by which we can work and live, evokes a wondrous anticipation before which I fall silent.



## Notes

1. Robert A. McCaughey, *Scholars and Teachers: The Faculties of Select Liberal Arts Colleges and Their Place in American Higher Education* (New York: Barnard College, 1994).
2. I mean these as heuristic, if historically anchored, not totalizing terms, being particularly mindful of the elusive, fractured, and multiple nature of the “public sphere” (see, e.g., *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993]).
3. F. W. J. Schelling, *On University Studies*, trans. E. S. Morgan, ed. Norbert Guterman (Athens: Ohio UP, 1966) 5, 7.
4. Among many who have commented on the relation between Schelling’s anthropological idealism and his foundational vision of the modern university, Samuel Weber provides the most pertinent provocation for an attendant reconsideration of contemporary “humanistic” education. See “The Future of the Humanities: Experimenting,” *Culture Machine 2* (2000): 1-11.
5. Thorstein Veblen, *Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918); Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996); Mary Poovey, “The Twenty-First-Century University and the Market: What Price Viability?” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 12.1 (2001): 1-16.
6. Poovey, 11.
7. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University: Defined and Illustrated* (London: Longmans, Green, 1925) 126.
8. David Damrosch, *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995).
9. “Civilization,” *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18 (*Essays on Politics and Society*), ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977) 117-47 (see esp. 138-47).
10. Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Pantheon, 1974) xxix.
11. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845; New York: Signet, 1968) 31-32.
12. “Why We Built the Ivory Tower,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2004: A23.
13. See Lila Guterman, “Stalled at the Border,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 11, 2003: A20-21.
14. Michael Arnove, “Watchful Eyes,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 11, 2003: A15.

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15. Kenneth P. Ruscio, *Journal of Higher Education* 58.2 (March/April 1987): 205-22 (my emphasis).
16. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).
17. William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003).

## Response

*Kenneth P. Ruscio*

I am honored to be part of this conversation—and also intimidated. Following a professor of literature and an historian, who are both fine representatives of disciplines that place a high premium on eloquently articulated arguments, compels me to choose words carefully and with at least some attention to style. It has been a pleasure to read their thoughts these past few days and now to hear them elaborate upon their written words.

I also appreciate so much the opportunity provided by ACLS to remind myself of some of the topics I studied a decade and a half ago.<sup>1</sup> If I haven't had the time to revisit that research as much as I would have preferred, it's only because I've been living the life of a liberal arts college teacher-scholar. My responses to Kimberly Benston and Robert McCaughey are framed by a return to the conclusions of that long-ago blissfully detached research— research that is now leavened, enhanced, buttressed, or crippled (I am not sure what the right word is) by the cold hard experience of 15 years in the trenches.

I will simply raise a few questions and make a few assertions— assertions that, truth be known, will be put forth with far more conviction than I truly possess and with far more certitude than the situation warrants. I want to thicken the plot by building upon the points raised by Benston and McCaughey and extending a few of them perhaps further than either of our presenters would agree with.

The one incontrovertible conclusion I draw from these two fine papers as well as our discussions this weekend is that it is indeed time to take a careful and critical look at the teacher-scholar faculty model in liberal arts colleges. The examination should be empirical: What is the practice these days? And it should be normative: What should the model be and how does current practice depart from the idealized model, if at all? The answers to those questions will help us understand the historical moment in which liberal arts colleges now find themselves. They will also help us understand the highly differentiated world of higher education today.

I have four points to make.

First, the argument whether we are teacher-scholars at selective liberal arts colleges, as opposed to teachers, is a dead issue. It is dead in the sense that no one disputes that the evolution has occurred, as an empirical matter. And it is dead in the sense that nearly all faculty members at liberal arts colleges think it a good thing to engage in scholarship. An expectation of research is built into our reward systems, our culture, and of course our tenure and promotion procedures. But these organizational carrots and sticks are only part of the explanation. Faculty nowadays are not dragged kicking and screaming into scholarship. They embrace it and honor it.

That is not to say that alumni, students, or trustees embrace this approach. As McCaughey points out, scholarship and teaching are not zero-sum activities in our professorial eyes. We understand quite well that knowledge advances quickly these days, that professors need to model for their students the lifelong “active learners” we expect them to be, and that the capacity to challenge conventional wisdom is fundamental to a liberally educated person. Time to engage in original work and the aspiration to shape one’s field are important parts of the modern academic profession, and it is the rare faculty member these days who considers scholarly pursuits a detriment to his or her teaching ability. But try explaining to trustees, as many of you perhaps have, that a reduction in teaching load can be a net positive for an institution’s teaching mission.

Nevertheless the seamlessness of teaching and scholarship under the right set of conditions is a conviction for many of us. I dare say that all of us at this meeting are fiercely dedicated to the distinctive mission of liberal arts colleges. But read through the biographical statements we submitted and note the almost universal references to our scholarship and publications—references we make with pride rather than with embarrassment or apology for time wasted on efforts that detract from our credentials as a member of a liberal arts faculty. We write and publish because it is one more way to encounter ideas and confront intellectual problems; and at least on this very general level we surely see it as complementary to what we do in our liberal arts setting.

But if there is broad consensus on that point, there is, and this is my second point, great dispute beneath the surface. If we agree that the model has indeed evolved, we disagree on how to describe it beyond these very general terms; and there is a sense that not all its features are benign. McCaughey and Benston, for example, both talk about a refinement of the model—a movement towards a particular model with different features than currently exists. But I wonder whether what is at stake is less a refinement of the model and more a refinement of the argument and justification for scholarship at a liberal arts college . . . refinement that would enable us to identify, select, and promote those features we would like to preserve while purging those features that detract from our institutional missions.

For example, is our scholarship different from the kind that is conducted at research universities? Sociologists of higher education argue that the academic profession is the result of the convergence of two structural features: education in a particular field of study—a discipline if you will—and an institutional setting.<sup>2</sup> A genotype and a phenotype. The hypothesis would be that the liberal arts college, as an institution with particular organizational features, must have some influence on how professors shape their work. As my political science brethren would put it in a different context, institutions matter. And a liberal arts college is not the same kind of institution as a research university.

Now it gets complicated, of course, but does a liberal arts college with its less specialized undergraduate student audiences and the routine interaction of faculty across areas of specialization and intellectual traditions encourage more integrative and interdisciplinary work? My afternoon runs at Washington and Lee were with a physicist, a professor of religious studies, a law professor and historian, a philosopher, an environmental economist, and a comparative political scientist. Did that daily 45 minute interdisciplinary seminar raise the probability at least that our scholarship would be more horizontal than vertical, more interdisciplinary than highly specialized, more critical of work in our own disciplines, more creative?

Teaching introductory courses—and I mean really teaching them—conversing with colleagues outside your field on a regular basis, attending public lectures and meeting with visitors in different disciplines, all of that is bound to result in different questions being asked, different methodologies being employed to answer them, and, as one faculty member put it to me long ago, scholarship that is less “taxonomically upstanding.” As Benston notes in his paper, “We might allow ourselves to assert SLACs as being themselves the vanguard model for intellectual and pedagogical work in the academy, as we are today best positioned to craft innovative, effective models of vocation by dint of size, a distinctive blend of older and more recent habits of scholarly development and curricular organization, and a long-nurtured habit of asking alongside our students just exactly the forgoing questions about the place of knowledge and learning in the enveloping public sphere.” The teacher-scholar model in a liberal arts college is not an adaptation of the research university approach to a constrained organizational setting. Instead it is a model with virtues all its own developed in a setting that affords advantages not available elsewhere.

If in fact our scholarship is distinctive, the next question is whether that is a good thing. Is it good research, first of all, and is it good for the institution? In the interest of time, I’ll leave that question dangling, except to note that this is what I mean by wondering whether the refinement we seek is an improved ability

to distinguish between the kind of distinctive scholarship we should embrace at a liberal arts college and the kind of scholarship that may be distinctive but does not necessarily contribute either to our students' education or the world of knowledge that lies outside the boundaries of our campuses.

Third, in a practical, policy-related way, what trends in higher education and what administrative practices support the development of a distinctive scholarship and which ones inhibit it? There are so many to discuss, but here are a couple of developments worthy of some attention.

*The slow drift towards measuring scholarly productivity in ways that reflect what Benston in particular describes as the market-like approach to accountability.* Just as the accountability-induced move towards student assessment tempts us to focus on student learning outcomes that are measurable rather than important, so the attempt to measure faculty research productivity tempts us to focus on measurable outcomes that may or may not be important.

I'm not talking about merely counting publications, but it's hard, if we are being honest, to encourage young faculty to do interdisciplinary work, to undertake a research project that may take awhile to find its stride, to engage, in other words, in precisely the kind of integrative, creative, critical, exciting thinking we seek to inculcate in our students. My favorite bugaboo in this context is the now conventional set of outside letters required for tenure and promotion—a mechanism that lowers the probability that our younger faculty members will fashion their research in any kind of distinctive manner and extends the period of time before they can cut the umbilical cord to the culture of research universities they supposedly left when we hired them.

*The separation of moral and civic education from the curriculum.* Liberal arts colleges have historically articulated their missions in terms of educating the whole person, of influencing the heart as well as the mind, of preparing students for lives of consequence and helping them develop commitments larger than themselves. Teaching and advancing the discipline are different enterprises than developing moral and ethical thinking. They are not necessarily in

conflict, although they can be, but at the very least the emphasis can surely be quite different. To the degree we cling to the inclusion of moral and civic education in the curriculum, we increasingly relegate it to general education or lower-level courses.<sup>3</sup> If we lose civic and moral education as a primary curricular objective—if we accept without challenge the argument that moral and civic education can be left only to general education or even worse solely to the extra- or cocurricular life of the student, faculty scholarship will become even more separate from our institutional missions.

On the bright side, however, look at the centers or interdisciplinary programs that are popping up all over the place at liberal arts colleges. If someone has time to undertake the study, I bet we would find that they are based on much different rationales than similar structures at research universities. Centers for the study of poverty, the environment, or my own school of leadership studies are quite explicit in their references to engaging students with the world around them. In their best moments they represent an adaptation of moral and civic education to the exigencies of modern curriculum design—and they speak, I think, to Benston’s point about discovering and participating in the public sphere today in a manner consistent with our traditional and evolving mission.

My last point is precisely on this topic of the public sphere. Any discussion of the teacher-scholar faculty model cannot go far these days without clarity about what a liberal arts education means in contemporary society. And on the particular point about the place of the liberal arts in the public sphere there is some dispute. On one side are those who value detachment, a critical examination of one’s values, and an education that features the discovery of the self. On the other side are those who emphasize engagement over detachment, instilling moral and civic values, preparation for the responsibilities and demands of citizenship, and the discovery of something greater than one’s self. Explanations of the purpose of a liberal arts college will have to dodge the market responsiveness that Benston alerts us to—the pressure to justify the curriculum in terms of utility—as well as the misperception from other quarters that “values” education is a covert form of politicization. How to engage



that “values” education is a covert form of politicization. How to engage society while remaining distant and critical has long been a challenge for a liberal arts institution, but never more so than now. And never in a manner more challenging for the professoriate. The nature of our scholarship, the link to our teaching, the role faculty and our institutions play in the public sphere are more than just worthy topics for our consideration. The stakes are higher. The future of liberal arts colleges is dependent upon a distinctive mission—which, at least in my view, is dependent upon a distinctive model of the professoriate.

## Notes

1. Kenneth P. Ruscio, “The Distinctive Scholarship of the Selective Liberal Arts Colleges,” *Journal of Higher Education* 58.2 (March/April 1987): 205-22.
2. Burton R. Clark, *The Academic Life: Small Worlds, Different Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987).
3. Ann Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, and Jason Stephens, eds., *Educating Citizens: Preparing America’s Undergraduates for Lives of Civic and Moral Responsibility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).



**II. THE PRESENT:**  
**EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

## **Built To Engage: Liberal Arts Colleges and Effective Educational Practice**

*George D. Kuh*

Are liberal arts colleges as rich with educational opportunity for their students as their proponents claim? Or are many headed the way of the dinosaur, as public universities mainstream pedagogical innovations such as learning communities, increase student-faculty research options, and invest in learner-centered technologies?<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I summarize some of what we know about student engagement in educationally purposeful activities at liberal arts colleges. Sidestepping any discussion about what constitutes a liberal arts college, or a liberal arts education, I use the Carnegie Foundation's (2000) definition: institutions that are primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on baccalaureate degree programs and that award at least half of their baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts.

### **The Student Experience at Liberal Arts Colleges**

Scholars generally agree that the liberal arts college exemplifies what is "best" educational practice in undergraduate education.<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the impact of different types of institutions on their students almost always favor liberal arts colleges.<sup>3</sup> That is, liberal arts college students tend to gain more in intellectual and personal development, more frequently pursue advanced graduate study, and are more likely to vote and take part in civic matters after college. A study conducted by Professor Ernest Pascarella and his

colleagues at the University of Iowa and the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College found that the favorable effects of liberal arts colleges on a variety of desired outcomes of college persist well into the post-college years. One common explanation for what appears to be the superiority of liberal arts colleges is that they attract relatively well-prepared and highly motivated students. Yet, after controlling for selectivity at both the student and institutional level, the advantages that obtain for liberal arts colleges in terms of effective educational practices remain.<sup>4</sup> Why?

One explanation is that liberal arts colleges create distinctive, developmentally powerful learning conditions that result in a practical as well as liberating educational experience.<sup>5</sup> Richard Hersh accounts for the heightened impact of the liberal arts college experience this way:

Residential liberal arts colleges—by virtue of their primary focus on teaching, their small size, residential nature, quest for genuine community, engagement of students in active learning, concern for a general and coherent education, and emphasis on the development of the whole person—provide the most important kind of undergraduate education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. . . . They are *sui generis*, themselves a special kind of pedagogy.<sup>6</sup>

But what if structural features such as size and residential character are only part of the equation of a developmentally powerful experience? What if liberal arts colleges also happen to more frequently employ effective educational practices than other types of institutions? And what if these practices are transportable and “add value” to the undergraduate experience—that is, what if liberal arts colleges out-perform what one might expect, given the entering ability of their students and institutional features? Then, liberal arts colleges are not only vital, but other forms and sectors of postsecondary education can learn some things from them.<sup>7</sup>

## Assessing Student Engagement

To begin to answer these and other questions I draw on information from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The project was stimulated by discussions in the mid 1990s to find ways to obtain and report legitimate alternative sources of information about collegiate quality, an effort that unlike rankings would be based on research about student development and institutional effectiveness. Established with a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, NSSE (referred to as “nessie”) is now supported entirely by institutional participation fees and is co-sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. The foundation for NSSE is the “quality of student effort” concept on which C. Robert Pace developed the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) in the mid-1970s with a grant from the Spencer Foundation. Alexander Astin subsequently further fleshed out and popularized the concept with his “theory of involvement.”<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on the CSEQ and other long-running college student surveys, the relatively short NSSE instrument was designed by assessment experts and extensively tested to insure its validity and reliability and to minimize non-response bias. It is squarely focused on the extent to which first-year students and seniors engage in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience.<sup>9</sup> Average response rate for paper and Web versions is about 43 percent. Although NSSE doesn’t assess student learning outcomes directly, the main content of the NSSE instrument, *The College Student Report*, represents student behaviors that are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college. Since 2000, more than 430,000 students from 730 four-year colleges and universities have participated at least once. Liberal arts colleges make up about 18 percent of the institutions participating in NSSE, which is about their proportion (16 percent) of all four-year colleges. Thus, liberal arts colleges are well represented in NSSE, with 125 or 55 percent of the 228 total of all liberal arts colleges in the United States. Overall, the NSSE database reflects in 2003 about 58 percent of the undergraduate FTE enrolled at four-year colleges and universities.

To make student engagement results easier to understand and use as well as more accessible to a variety of stakeholders, NSSE grouped questions about student and institutional performance into five clusters or benchmarks of effective educational practices (Appendix A). They are:

- Academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment

The scores for the benchmarks are standardized on a 100 point scale.

Participating institutions allow NSSE to use their data in the aggregate for national and sector reporting purposes and other undergraduate improvement initiatives. Institutions can use their own data for institutional purposes. Results specific to each institution and identified as such are not made public by NSSE except by mutual agreement.

### **What Have We Learned About Student Engagement at Liberal Arts Colleges?**

A variety of analyses conducted over the past several years shows that students at liberal arts colleges generally are more engaged across the board in effective educational practices than their counterparts at other types of institutions. On all five NSSE clusters of effective educational practice and other measures, liberal arts colleges score consistently higher than any other type of institution. The results favoring liberal arts colleges are net of various student characteristics, such as gender and age, and institutional features such as size, selectivity, residential nature, and sector. The box and whiskers chart in Appendix B illustrates this by showing the benchmark scores by institutional type. Each column shows the benchmark scores at the fifth, 25th, 50th (median), 75th, and 95th percentiles. The rectangular box shows the 25th to 75th percentile range, or the middle 50 percent of all scores. The “whiskers” on top and bottom represent the 95th and 5th percentiles.

Consistent with their espoused mission, liberal arts colleges also engage students more frequently in activities that encourage them to integrate their curricular and co-curricular experiences.<sup>10</sup> This set of activities (Figure 1) is a proxy for deep learning, requiring use of knowledge, skills, and competencies across a variety of academic and social activities that are integrated into a meaningful whole.

Figure 1.

### **Integration Scale**

- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments
- Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of classes
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of classes (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)
- Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships

**Information Technology and Library Use.** In terms of using information technology, seniors at liberal arts colleges tend to be exposed less than first-year students to information technology in the classroom compared with their counterparts at other types of institutions. For example, compared with students at doctoral-granting universities, seniors at liberal arts colleges are not as often required to use information technology to complete assignments, make class presentations, or work in teams outside of class. At the same time, the proportions of seniors who say they “never” do these activities are about the same at all types of institutions, suggesting



that liberal arts college students are using information technology, but not to the same degree; this may be in part a function of major field and class size. Information technology use reported by first-year students is more similar across institutional types.

The areas where liberal arts colleges seem to use information technology less frequently are in the classroom and in taking courses online. For example, only half as many liberal arts college students take one or more courses online as students at other colleges and universities—five percent and 11-12 percent respectively. It is worth noting that while liberal arts college students are similar to their counterparts elsewhere in terms of obtaining information for academic work from the World Wide Web, they are less likely to say that their peers “frequently” cut and paste from the Web into their papers or reports without attribution (76 percent frosh and 82 percent seniors compared with 89 percent frosh and 91 percent seniors at other institutions).

In addition, the pattern of student experiences with academic libraries at liberal arts colleges sets them apart from other types of institutions. For example, students at liberal arts colleges more frequently ask librarians for assistance and use the library Web site to obtain resources for their academic work. Moreover, liberal arts college students’ experiences with the library are strongly correlated with other educationally purposeful activities, such as working with a faculty member on research or discussing papers with faculty members,<sup>11</sup> perhaps because the library is in close proximity to where students live, making access much easier.

**Campus Climate for Learning.** Liberal arts colleges also offer qualitatively distinctive learning environments. That is, students at liberal arts colleges score well above their peers on measures of support for their academic and social needs. The quality of relationships between various groups on campus is particularly high, with a few exceptions, one of which is noted later in terms of women’s colleges. One troubling finding is that students of color, especially African American students, do not find the liberal arts college environment as supportive as other students.<sup>12</sup>

**Enriching Educational Experiences.** Another area in which liberal arts colleges perform well is the degree to which their students take advantage of opportunities to enrich their educational experience. For example, seniors at liberal arts colleges are more likely to have done community service or volunteer work, studied a foreign language, studied abroad, done independent study, and had a culminating senior experience, such as a capstone or senior thesis (Figure 2). They are also much more likely to have worked on a research project with a faculty member (39 percent compared with 29 percent of their peers at doctoral extensive universities). Indeed, at the highest performing liberal arts colleges, almost half of seniors reported doing a research project with a faculty member. The one educationally enriching experience that liberal arts colleges do not lead the pack in is participating in a learning community. This is mildly disappointing, because learning communities have numerous positive effects on other aspects of engagement as well as a host of desired outcomes of college; in addition, these positive effects persist into the senior year of college.<sup>13</sup>

Students at liberal arts colleges take greater advantage of enriching educational experiences for several reasons. First, they are

Figure 2.

| Percentage of Seniors Who Participated in Various Educationally Enriching Activities |        |        |          |      |       |       |
|--|--------|--------|----------|------|-------|-------|
|  | DR-Ext | DR-Int | Master's | B-LA | B-Gen | Total |
| Practicum, internship, field experience  | 72%    | 72%    | 72%      | 74%  | 71%   | 72%   |
| Community service/volunteer work   | 66%    | 60%    | 64%      | 77%  | 67%   | 66%   |
| Research with faculty member   | 29%    | 26%    | 23%      | 39%  | 24%   | 27%   |
| Learning community   | 25%    | 25%    | 27%      | 25%  | 28%   | 27%   |
| Foreign language   | 44%    | 35%    | 35%      | 65%  | 36%   | 41%   |
| Study abroad   | 18%    | 14%    | 14%      | 35%  | 15%   | 18%   |
| Independent study/self-designed  | 24%    | 26%    | 26%      | 43%  | 30%   | 29%   |
| Culminating senior experience  | 49%    | 58%    | 55%      | 73%  | 66%   | 60%   |

predisposed to doing many of these things when they begin college.<sup>14</sup> In addition, liberal arts college students attend college full time and live on campus; thus, they have more ready access to opportunities for learning, both inside and outside the classroom. And they have more time to do these things, as they do not care for dependents to the same degree as students elsewhere and they work fewer hours on average than their counterparts at different types of institutions; those that do work tend to do so more on campus than off. However, even when these factors are taken into account, students at liberal arts colleges engage more in enriching educational activities than students at other types of institutions.

**Experiences with Diversity.** One of the more surprising findings from NSSE is that liberal arts college students report more experiences with diversity than their counterparts at other types of institutions (Table 1, p. 137).<sup>15</sup> The advantage is non-trivial, as indicated by a pattern of substantial effect sizes, after controlling for student and other institutional features. For example, students at liberal arts colleges are significantly more likely than their counterparts at other types of institutions to talk seriously with other students who have different views or who are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to report making more progress in understanding people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. They are also more satisfied overall with their college experience. In addition, experience with diversity is strongly linked with viewing the campus climate as being supportive of academic and social needs. These effects are most pronounced for white students at liberal arts colleges.<sup>16</sup>

This pattern of results is surprising if for no other reason than that many of these institutions are not naturally imbued with structural diversity; that is, many do not enroll substantial numbers of racial and ethnic minorities. A large number of liberal arts colleges were located for historical reasons in rural settings,<sup>17</sup> which are neither populated nor viewed as desirable collegiate environments by students from historically underrepresented groups.<sup>18</sup> As a result, liberal arts colleges do not score well on numerical indicators of diversity, such as a diversity density index or the

likelihood of interaction between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Only baccalaureate general colleges have a lower average diversity density index than liberal arts colleges.<sup>19</sup>

The types of meaningful relationships that lead to such outcomes are certainly possible and even numerous on larger, more complex university campuses. However, they are probably more likely to occur where the features of the learning environment induce ongoing, personal contact rather than idiosyncratic and intermittent contact where anonymity prevails. Smaller, residential, more human-scale settings create interpersonal environments where interactions among students from different backgrounds tend to take place over extended periods of time. Because these students live in close proximity, they are more likely to know one another; thus, relationships between students from different backgrounds may well deepen into friendships, become more meaningful, and have greater impact than passing acquaintances.<sup>20</sup> As a result, students are more likely to engage in mixed-race conversations outside of class about what they are learning, world events, and current issues, which to a degree reflect the goals of any institution's general education program.

**Special-Mission Liberal Arts Colleges.** The salience and magnitude of the impact of certain liberal arts colleges are in large part a function of clearly focused missions. Women's colleges are a case in point, as are institutions that feature a values-based philosophy and curriculum.

*Educating Women.* As a set of undergraduate institutions, women's colleges are more engaging for women than are coeducational institutions almost across the board.<sup>21</sup> For example, women at women's colleges are more likely to have higher quality and more frequent interactions with faculty and with peers, report greater levels of academic challenge, and perceive the environment to be more supportive of their overall success (Table 2, p. 138). This is true for both first-year students and seniors. However, consistent with other data, seniors at women's colleges do not find their campus climate to be as supportive of their social interests and

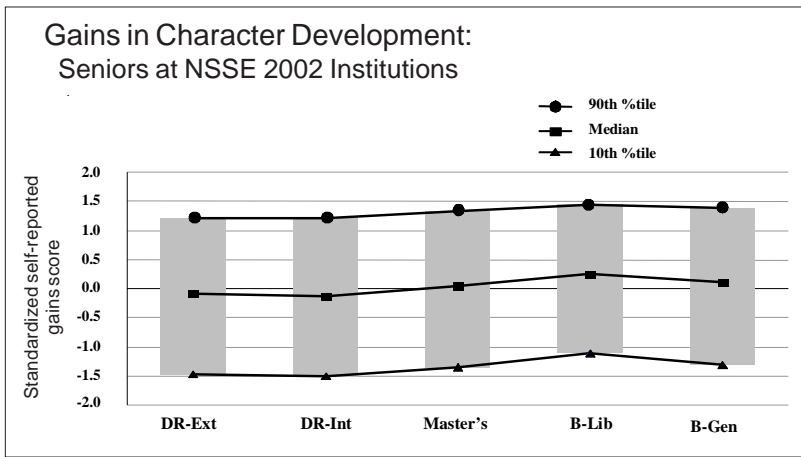
needs.<sup>22</sup> This does not, however, seem to have a deleterious effect on other aspects of their experience in terms of levels of engagement or outcomes. There is limited evidence to suggest that men's colleges can be similarly "highly engaging" for their students; this is certainly the case for Wabash College, for example, which is one of the schools included in the DEEP project mentioned later because of its higher-than-predicted student engagement scores and graduation rates.

*Character Development.* Shaping values and ethics was a primary goal of undergraduate education in the colonial colleges.<sup>23</sup> But even with the secularization of American higher education, many liberal arts colleges have continued to espouse as one of their educational purposes providing students with opportunities to discover, refine, and test their values, or develop their character. Indeed, many liberal arts colleges claim to leave a distinctive imprint on the attitudes and values of their graduates. In this context, we can think of character as a window into personality, a constellation of attitudes, values, ethical considerations, and behavioral patterns that represent what people believe and value, how they think, and what they do. Thus, character is manifested in both intellectual and behavioral dimensions of public and private life, including a demonstrated commitment to the public good, personal integrity and responsibility, and an examined understanding of one's ethical responsibility to self and the larger community.

Figure 3 shows that—as with many other desired outcomes—students at liberal arts colleges report making greater gains in character development, followed by their peers at baccalaureate general colleges, master's granting institutions, and the two largest institutions, the doctoral/research university extensive and doctoral/research university intensive.<sup>24</sup> Also, students at religiously affiliated institutions report greater gains in character development than students at unaffiliated institutions.

Among the activities likely to contribute to character development are engaging in integrative activities, doing community service or working on a project in the community that is related to a course, volunteering, and being exposed to diversity in the

Figure 3.

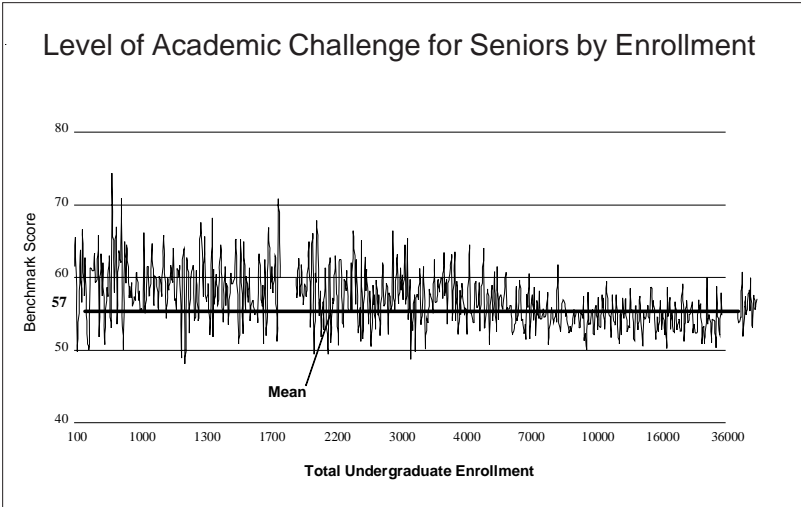


classroom, and talking with students from other races and ethnicities or having conversations with students who have different political and social views. Additionally, students at campuses that have a more supportive campus climate are more likely to indicate growth in character development. As we have seen, liberal arts colleges are generally stronger in these areas compared with other types of institutions. Thus, it stands to reason that students at liberal arts colleges would gain more in terms of character development.

### Caveat Emptor

Taken together, these findings give ample reason to cheer liberal arts colleges in terms of the nature and frequency with which their students engage in educationally purposeful activities, especially compared with other types of four-year colleges and universities. At the same time, the differences in average scores between liberal arts colleges and other types of institutions are not always great enough to represent a practical or meaningful difference, perhaps, in terms of what an individual student may experience. In addition, there are dozens of individual institutional exceptions to the general rule that liberal arts college students are more engaged in effective educational practice. This is illustrated by Figure 4—what I call the EKG of student engagement in American higher education.<sup>25</sup>

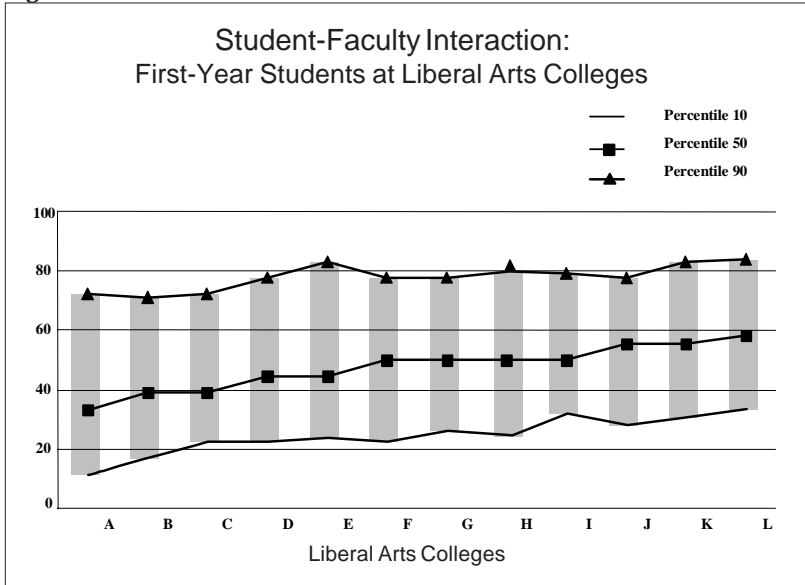
Figure 4.



While smaller schools are, on average, more academically challenging, some large universities score better on this dimension than many smaller colleges. This pattern also holds for the four other benchmarks of effective educational practice. So, while smaller is generally better, it depends on the specific institutions being compared, because some large public universities are as, or more, engaging in certain areas than some small liberal arts colleges. Thus, claims about collegiate quality cannot be generalized to all institutions in a given sector nor can we say that all colleges of a certain type and size are comparable, or that one type is superior to another.

**Within College Variance.** Figure 5 shows the frequency of first-year student contact with faculty members at liberal arts colleges. The scores range (from left to right) from the lowest scoring school to the highest scoring school. While the average difference between the lowest and highest scoring school is less than 10 points, there is considerable variance within liberal arts colleges. That is, within each of the institutions the variance between the middle students, 80 percent of students, is two or three times the size of the average differences between colleges. Thus, while many students at a given college have frequent, high-quality interactions with their faculty

Figure 5.



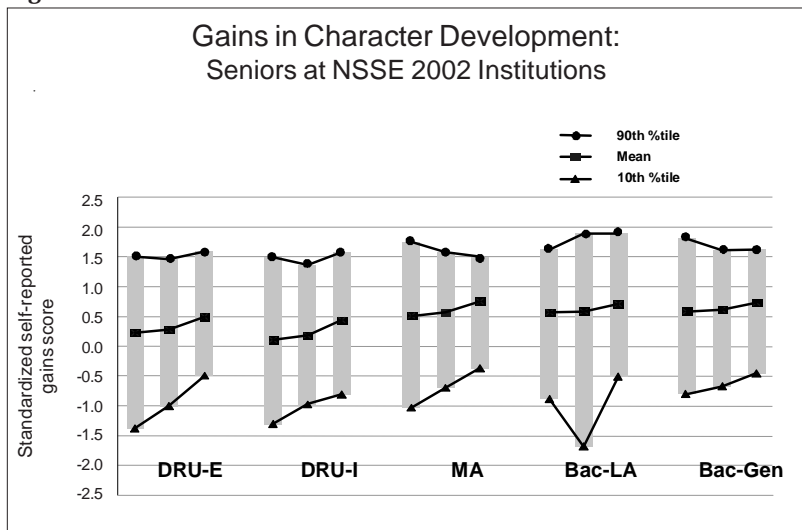
members, substantial numbers of students have much less contact than is desirable. Once again, this same pattern holds for the other four benchmarks of effective educational practice as well as for other institutional types.

This same pattern also holds for most college outcomes, as exhibited by gains in character development (Figure 6) where the liberal arts college selected to represent the middle of its distribution has a relatively high average score, but a sizeable fraction of its students score much lower on the character development measure than the typical student at some master’s granting institutions and even some large doctoral/research extensive universities.

The within-institutional variance with regard to the student experience is really more problematic than it may appear, because as noted earlier, the bottom 10 percent of students is not shown. Thus, a key challenge is finding ways to identify and then more fully engage those students who fall well below average, a disproportionate number of whom are men. Reaching more under-engaged students will improve their learning and also boost overall institutional and national benchmark scores because there is more room



Figure 6.



to move upward on the scales. Focusing on students who are already engaged at relatively high levels—those who are in the upper quarter, say, of the engagement distribution—will produce only marginal differences in overall educational quality. This is not to say that such students should be ignored or that they would not reap some benefit. But with limited time and resources it may make sense for many schools to target interventions toward students who are in the lower third of the engagement distribution.

**How Much is Optimal?** In terms of student engagement, it's not clear that “more” is always better if student learning is the goal. For example, in terms of student-faculty contact, it's important to focus on the right kinds of interactions. NSSE questions intentionally address substantive interactions, as contrasted with social encounters, because the latter have little to no direct effects on learning gains or the amount of effort students devote to academics. In fact, some research studies show that students who have a good deal of casual contact with faculty outside the classroom report making less progress toward desired outcomes.<sup>26</sup> Because the key to student learning is both the *nature* and *frequency* of contact, some forms of

“occasional” contact with faculty members may be enough. Four of the six behaviors on the student-faculty interaction benchmark are of this kind: (1) discussing grades and assignments, (2) discussing career plans, (3) working with a faculty member outside of class on a committee or project, and (4) doing research with a faculty member. For most students doing the first three of these once or twice a semester is probably good enough. That is, “occasionally” discussing career plans with a faculty member is sufficient for seeing the relevance of their studies to a self-sufficient, satisfying life after college. Working on a research project with a faculty member just once during college could be a life-altering experience. But for the other two activities—getting prompt feedback and discussing ideas presented in readings or class discussion—it’s plausible that the more frequent the behavior the better.

Active and collaborative learning is an effective educational practice because students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others on academic work and problem solving prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted situations they will encounter daily during and after college. But do all students who report more experience with such activities learn more? We have some insight from the Value-Added project which coadministered NSSE with experimental measures developed by RAND and the Council for the Advancement of Education to assess the types of outcomes associated with liberal arts education.<sup>27</sup> Data come from more than a thousand students at about a dozen institutions who completed the battery of instruments in the spring of 2002.<sup>28</sup>

Though far from conclusive, it appears that higher ability students (those who scored greater than 1300 on the SAT) may benefit less from active and collaborative learning activities than their lower-scoring (below 990) counterparts. The lower-scoring group appeared to benefit more in student engagement and learning outcomes from high quality personal relationships, a supportive campus environment, and experiences with diversity. In addition to ability as measured by the SAT, preferred learning styles may also

be a factor. That is, “higher ability” students may come to college being more proficient in abstract reasoning compared with “lower ability” students who perform better when course material is presented in concrete terms and they have opportunities to apply concepts to their daily lives. These findings are mildly provocative, suggesting that interventions to boost student engagement may have the greatest payoff for those students who are most at-risk for leaving college prematurely. These and other examples indicate that “more” activity may not always be “better” in terms of student learning.<sup>29</sup> Ability, learning style, and major field need to be taken into account when drawing conclusions about student engagement, learning, and collegiate quality. Other factors may also be relevant, such as institutional mission and the learning goals that faculty members have for their courses and major field.

### **Final Thoughts**

In many respects, liberal arts colleges set the bar for American higher education in terms of effective educational practice. On balance, they provide a challenging, yet supportive, educational environment for their students. In light of the caveats mentioned earlier, in order to make more definitive statements about the performance of liberal arts colleges we need to know more, especially if prospective students and others are to use this or related information in selecting a college. This is especially important if Earlham College President Doug Bennett is correct, that most students and parents begin the college search process by focusing on just one category of institution, and then sorting from high to low *within* this category. This is, of course, what *U.S. News and World Report* does with its rankings, segmenting institutions into research universities, national liberal arts colleges, regional colleges and universities, and so forth. Few meaningful comparisons that matter to student learning are made across categories on aspects of the student experience and institutional performance. Moreover, much of what drives the rankings are institutional resources and reputation, neither of which (along with selectivity) are positively related to effective educational practice<sup>30</sup> or desired outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

The findings reported earlier are all based on liberal arts colleges—public and private. Additional work could be done to tease out the relationships between student engagement and institutional control, such as public and private and sectarian and non-sectarian. It's likely that these further analyses will produce only modest differentials that almost always favor private over public, though when certain patterns of behaviors and outcomes are considered along with institutional mission, such as character development, the differences that favor schools with particular characteristics (e.g., denominational colleges) may be substantial.

Because of the cost differential between most private liberal arts colleges and other forms of postsecondary education, it would be instructive to determine whether student engagement is related to gross or discounted tuition arrangements and other features of financial aid, including changes in the ratio of gift aid, loans, and other aid between the first and last year of college.

Public perceptions of collegiate quality are substantially swayed by institutional reputations and other vestiges of prestige that may have little to do with actual performance of students or institutions.<sup>32</sup> Yet we know relatively little about student engagement and educational effectiveness at the elite, highly selective liberal arts colleges and universities—what Robert Zemsky calls “medallion” institutions.<sup>33</sup> In all likelihood, such results would show even greater general net effects favoring liberal arts colleges—more frequent participation in effective educational practices and so forth. However, medallion institutions are supposed to be good at everything. But no school is perfect. Indeed, none of the 700+ colleges and universities participating in NSSE performs at the top on each of the five benchmarks of effective educational practice. This is another instance where market forces trump transparency and improvement efforts. Until higher education learns how to appropriately use and responsibly report information that reflects the core of the collegiate enterprise—student learning and the practices that foster learning—affluence and reputation will unfortunately continue to be disproportionately emphasized as markers of collegiate quality over student development and educational excellence.

Table 1.

| Dependent variable                                    | DR-Ext   |         | DR-Int   |         | Master's |         | B-GEN    |         |
|---|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
|   | 1st year | Seniors | 1st year | Seniors | 1st year | Seniors | 1st year | Seniors |
| <b>Student Engagement</b>                             |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |
| Academic challenge                                    | -.41 **  | -.38 ** | -.41 **  | -.37 ** | -.34 **  | -.30 ** | -.30 **  | -.29 ** |
| Higher order  | -.26 **  | -.23 ** | -.24 **  | -.21 ** | -.20 **  | -.16 ** | -.23 **  | -.21 ** |
| Active and Collaborative                              | -.44 **  | -.28 ** | -.32 **  | -.22 ** | -.19 **  | -.04    | -.06     | .00     |
| Diversity-related activities                          | -.21 **  | -.19 ** | -.24 **  | -.25 ** | -.27 **  | -.19 ** | -.30 **  | -.28 ** |
| <b>Supportive Campus Environment</b>                  |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |
| Supportive campus environment                         | -.37 **  | -.45 ** | -.37 **  | -.41 ** | -.20 **  | -.18 ** | -.07     | .00     |
| Interpersonal support                                 | -.37 **  | -.37 ** | -.35 **  | -.34 ** | -.20 **  | -.16 ** | -.08 *   | -.01    |
| Support for learning                                  | -.28 **  | -.39 ** | -.30 **  | -.36 ** | -.15 **  | -.14 ** | -.03     | .02     |
| Satisfaction  | -.09 *   | -.22 ** | -.22 **  | -.31 ** | -.14 **  | -.16 ** | -.11 *   | -.10 *  |
| <b>Gains in Learning and Intellectual Development</b> |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |
| Gains - personal/social                               | -.09 *   | -.22 ** | -.15 **  | -.26 ** | -.06 *   | -.12 ** | -.03     | -.08    |
| Gains - general education                             | -.35 **  | -.43 ** | -.34 **  | -.46 ** | -.19 **  | -.29 ** | -.17 **  | -.25 ** |
| <b>Gains in Social Awareness</b>                      |          |         |          |         |          |         |          |         |
| Gains - Contributing to community                     | -.19 **  | -.25 ** | -.25 **  | -.24 ** | -.13 **  | -.13 ** | -.06     | -.03    |
| Gains - Understanding self                            | -.08 *   | -.23 ** | -.17 **  | -.29 ** | -.08 **  | -.17 ** | -.03     | -.07 *  |
| Gains - Understanding others                          | -.15 **  | -.14 ** | -.08 *   | -.14 ** | .00      | -.04    | .05      | -.02    |

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01

Liberal Arts College omitted category.

Level 1 controls include age, race, gender, transfer, grades, Greek, major, full-time, first generation college.

From: Paul D. Umbach and George D. Kuh, "Student Experiences with Diversity at Liberal Arts Colleges: Another Claim for Distinctiveness." *Journal of Higher Education*, in press.

Table 2.

| <b>Effect Sizes for Student Engagement at Women's Colleges</b>   |                 |                |
|--|-----------------|----------------|
| <i>Dependent Variable</i>  | <i>1st Year</i> | <i>Seniors</i> |
| <b>Engagement</b>  |                 |                |
| Academic challenge   | .10 +           | .12 *          |
| Higher order thinking  | .08             | .13 *          |
| Active & collaborative learning  | .14 **          | .16 **         |
| Student-faculty interaction  | .18 **          | .09 +          |
| Integration  | .16 **          | .17 **         |
| Diversity-related activities   | .31 **          | .27 **         |
| <b>Supportive Campus Climate</b>   |                 |                |
| Supportive campus environment  | .06             | -.03           |
| Interpersonal support  | -.02            | -.08 *         |
| Support for success  | .11 *           | .01            |
| Satisfaction   | .01             | .02            |
| <b>Self-reported Gains</b>   |                 |                |
| Understanding self and others  | .16 **          | .11 *          |
| General education  | .11 *           | .08 +          |
| Analyzing quantitative problems  | .09 *           | .12 **         |
| Contributing to welfare of community   | .13 **          | .08 +          |
| + p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01   |                 |                |
| From: Paul D. Umbach, Jillian L. Kinzie, Auden D. Thomas, Megan M. Palmer, and George D. Kuh, "Women Students at Coeducational and Women's Colleges: How Do Their Experiences Compare?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Portland, OR, November 2003. |                 |                |

## Appendices

### Appendix A.

#### Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

**Level of Academic Challenge.** Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more
- Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages
- Number of written papers or reports fewer than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizes: Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Coursework emphasizes: Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences
- Coursework emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Coursework emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

**Student Interactions with Faculty Members.** Through interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom students see firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems. As a result their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning.

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked with a faculty member on a research project

**Active and Collaborative Learning.** Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)



**Enriching Educational Experiences.** Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable things about themselves and other cultures. Used appropriately, technology facilitates learning and promotes collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. Such experiences make learning more meaningful and, ultimately, more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are.

- Talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
- Talking with students of a different race or ethnicity
- An institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments
- Participating in:
  - internships or field experiences
  - community service or volunteer work
  - foreign language coursework
  - study abroad
  - independent study or self-designed major
  - culminating senior experience
  - cocurricular activities

**Supportive Campus Environment.** Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.

- Campus environment provides support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially

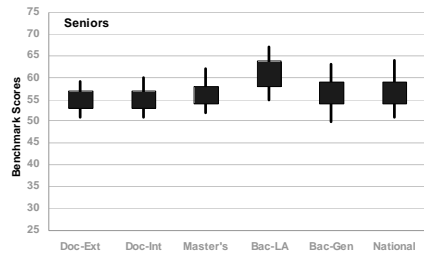
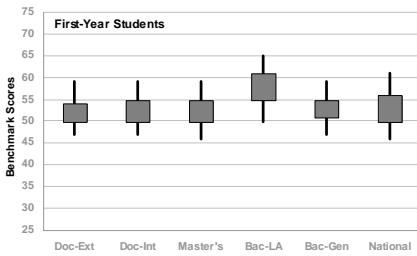
# Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education

- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

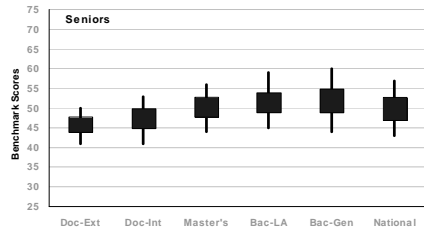
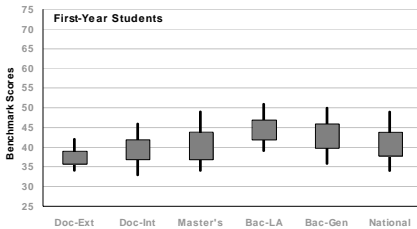
## Appendix B.

### Benchmarks Benchmark Scores by Carnegie Classification by Class Standing

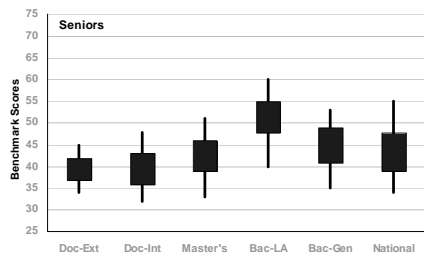
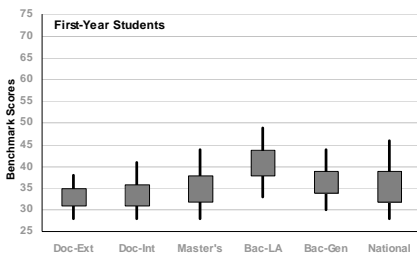
#### Academic Challenge



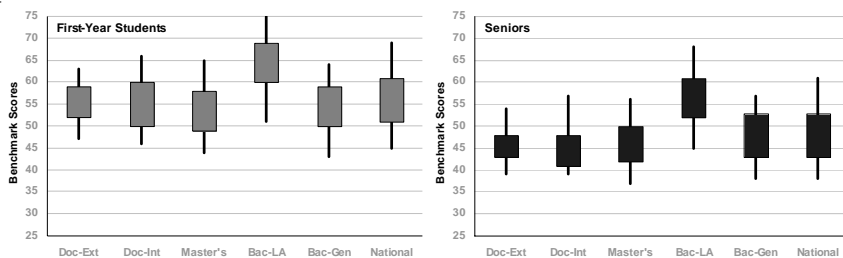
#### Active and Collaborative Learning



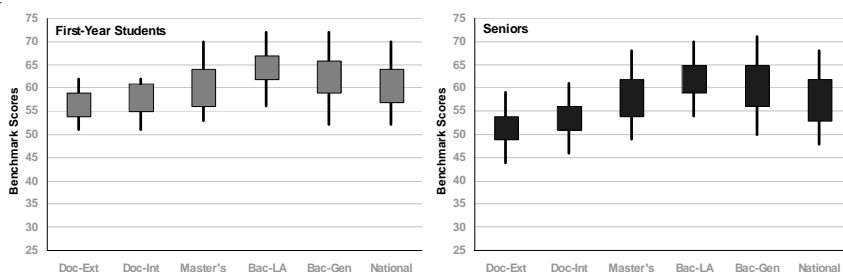
#### Student Interactions with Faculty Members



## Enriching Educational Experiences



## Supportive Campus Environment



## Notes

1. After reviewing evidence from institutions participating in the Pew-funded Course Redesign Program conducted by the Center for Academic Transformation, Carol Twigg concluded that with an effective use of technology, "student success can be achieved in class without increased student-faculty contact" ("Rethinking the Seven Principles," *The Learning MarketSpace*, November 9, 2002 <<http://www.center.rpi.edu/LForum/LdfLM.html>>). This requires being more intentional about the nature of the contact, such as being available on an as-needed "when students get stuck" basis, which is built into the redesigns of mathematics courses at Virginia Tech, the University of Alabama, and the University of Idaho.
2. Alexander. W. Astin, *Four Critical Years* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977); Arthur. W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," *AAHE Bulletin* 39.7 (1987): 3-7; Ernest T. Pascarella, *Owner's Manual* (New York: Norton, 1990); Richard H. Hersh, "Generating Ideals and Transforming Lives: A Contemporary Case for the Residential Liberal Arts College," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 173-94; Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini,

*How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

3. Astin, *Four Critical Years*; Alexander W. Astin, *Four Critical Years Revisited* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993); Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 77-100; Arthur W. Chickering, *Education and Identity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969); Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser, *Education and Identity*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993); Kenneth A. Feldman and Theodore M. Newcomb, *The Impact of College on Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969); George D. Kuh and Shouping Hu, "The Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction in the 1990s," *The Review of Higher Education* 24 (2001): 309-32; Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*.

4. The Pascarella and Wolniak study ("Assessment of Liberal Arts Education: Findings from the National Study of Student Learning," paper presented at the Assessment of Liberal Arts Education, Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, Crawfordsville, IN, August 2003) includes about 5,000 graduates of 26 institutions in the Appalachian region. Ten of these institutions are private baccalaureate liberal arts colleges. The graduates were surveyed approximately 5, 15, and 25 years after graduation. The study is particularly rich in that the researchers were able to link precollege data from an ACT assessment done at the time of college matriculation to a variety of college outcomes. This allows for controlling for salient factors, such as high school grades, parents' income and educational attainment, and institutional selectivity. On most measures, baccalaureate liberal arts college graduates performed at higher levels. Pascarella and his colleagues found similar effects for students in their National Study of Student Learning, a group they followed longitudinally for three years (1992-95). Although only 5 liberal arts colleges were included in the set of 16 institutions, the variety of measures used and the ability to control for precollege characteristics makes the study one of the better and more persuasive efforts. Controlling for such factors is important because students at liberal arts colleges tend to have higher parental education and income; they are also more predisposed to learning for self-understanding and enter college with better developed critical thinking skills. In addition, they are more likely to have been involved in a variety of ways in high school.

Pascarella and his colleagues concluded that compared to other institutions, liberal arts colleges were more likely to maximize "good practices in undergraduate education" (e.g., good teaching, interaction with faculty,

influential contact with peers, high academic expectations, student academic engagement, and so forth). The biggest differences between liberal arts colleges and other institutions were found in the first year of college and then shrank somewhat thereafter. Even so, these effects persist after controlling for student ability, motivation, and involvement in high school as well as some college factors such as living on campus, being enrolled full-time, and institutional selectivity (Ernest T. Pascarella, Gregory C. Wolniak, Tricia A. D. Seifert, Ty M. Cruce, and Charles F. Blaich, *Liberal Arts Colleges and Liberal Arts Education: New Evidence on Impacts* [Washington, DC: ASHE Higher Education Report 31.3 (2005)]). We have some limited evidence from the CSEQ program that corroborates these findings; that is, the expectations and predilections of students matriculating to liberal arts colleges are higher in many areas, such as the amount of reading, writing, and exposure to cultural events they hope to take advantage of (George D. Kuh, "Student Engagement in the First Year of College," *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*, ed. M. Lee Upcraft, John N. Gardner, and Betsy O. Barefoot [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005] 86-107).

5. Ellen Condliffe-Lagemann, "The Challenge of Liberal Education: Past, Present, and Future," *Liberal Education* 89.2 (2003): 6-13; Carol G. Schneider, "Silent Spring," *Liberal Education* 89.2 (2003): 2-3.

6. Hersh, "Generating Ideals and Transforming Lives," 192.

7. To learn more about especially engaging institutions and to share this information more broadly, the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) Institute was created in 2002 to help institutions use student engagement and related information in decision making and institutional improvement. The Institute conducts funded initiatives and collaborative ventures with a variety of partners including individual colleges and universities, institutional consortia, higher education organizations, and other entities. Two major Institute initiatives are underway, the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) and Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) projects. The centerpiece of Project DEEP is case studies of 20 strong-performing colleges and universities, including large, small, urban, and special mission institutions, each of which is distinguished by higher-than-predicted graduation rates and higher-than-predicted scores on the five NSSE national benchmarks of effective educational practice (George D. Kuh, Jillian L. Kinzie, John H. Schuh, Elizabeth J. Whitt, et al., *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass and American Association for Higher Education,

2005]). BEAMS is a five-year project designed to increase the number of minority-serving institutions using the NSSE survey for institutional improvement purposes. With support from the Lumina Foundation for Education, the American Association for Higher Education and NSSE are collaborating with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) that are members of the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education (AEHE) to improve retention, achievement, and institutional effectiveness. NSSE is also working with other national initiatives that have complementary purposes, such as the Foundations of Excellence project of The Policy Center on the First Year of College. The two dozen member schools of the Council of Independent Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) participating in this project are focused on improving the first-year experience of their students and NSSE will be used to evaluate their progress. NSSE also is collaborating with AASCU on its American Democracy project sponsored in part by *The New York Times*.

8. Alexander W. Astin, "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education," *Journal of College Student Personnel* 25 (1984): 297-308.

9. George D. Kuh, "Assessing What Really Matters to Student Learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement," *Change* 33.3 (2001): 10-17, 66.

10. National Survey of Student Engagement, *Converting Data into Action: Expanding the Boundaries of Institutional Improvement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2003).

11. George D. Kuh and Robert M. Gonyea, "The Role of the Academic Library in Promoting Student Engagement in Learning," *College and Research Libraries* 64 (2003): 256-82.

12. Shouping Hu and George D. Kuh, "Diversity Experiences and College Student Learning and Personal Development," *Journal of College Student Development* 44 (2003): 320-34; National Survey of Student Engagement, *The NSSE 2000 Report: National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2000); National Survey of Student Engagement, *Improving the College Experience: National Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2001).

13. Chun-Mei Zhao and George D. Kuh, "Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement," *Research in Higher Education* 45 (2004): 115-38.
14. Ernest T. Pascarella, Ty Cruce, Gregory C. Wolniak, George D. Kuh, Paul D. Umbach, John C. Hayek, Robert M. Carini, Robert M. Gonyea, and Chun-Mei Zhao, "Institutional Selectivity and Good Practices in Undergraduate Education," *Journal of Higher Education*, forthcoming.
15. Paul D. Umbach and George D. Kuh, "Student Experiences with Diversity at Liberal Arts Colleges: Another Claim for Distinctiveness," *Journal of Higher Education*, in press.
16. Hu and Kuh, "Diversity Experiences."
17. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990).
18. Mitchell J. Chang, "The Positive Educational Effects of Racial Diversity on Campus," *Diversity Challenged: Evidence on the Impact of Affirmative Action*, ed. Gary Orfield and Michal Kurlaender (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2001) 175-86.
19. Umbach and Kuh, "Student Experiences with Diversity."
20. Hu and Kuh, "Diversity Experiences."
21. Paul D. Umbach, Jillian L. Kinzie, Auden D. Thomas, Megan M. Palmer, and George D. Kuh, "Women Students at Coeducational and Women's Colleges: How Do Their Experiences Compare?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Portland, OR, November 2003.
22. Astin, *Four Critical Years*.
23. Rudolph, *The American College*.
24. George D. Kuh and Paul D. Umbach, "College and Character: Insights from the National Survey of Student Engagement," *Assessing Character Outcomes in College*, New Directions in Institutional Research, no. 122, ed. Jon C. Dalton, Terrence R. Russell, and Sally Kline (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004) 37-54. Character development is represented by nine items from the self-reported gains section on the NSSE survey that reflect four related dimensions of character development. The question posed to students is: "To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?"

## Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education

### *Knowledge of Self* (3 items):

- understanding self
- understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
- working effectively with others

### *Ethical Development and Problem Solving* (2 items):

- developing a personal code of ethics
- solving complex real-world problems

### *Civic Responsibility* (2 items):

- voting in local, state, and national elections
- contributing to the welfare of one's community

### *General Knowledge* (2 items):

- acquiring a broad, general education
- learning effectively on one's own

25. Kuh, "Assessing What Really Matters."

26. Kuh and Hu, "Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction."

27. Roger Benjamin and Richard H. Hersh, "Measuring the Difference That College Makes," *Peer Review* 4.2/3 (2002): 7-10.

28. Robert M. Carini, George D. Kuh, and Stephen P. Klein, "Student Engagement and Student Learning: Testing the Linkages," *Research in Higher Education*, forthcoming.

29. National Survey of Student Engagement, *Converting Data into Action*.

30. George D. Kuh and Ernest T. Pascarella, "What Does Institutional Selectivity Tell Us about Educational Quality?" *Change* 36.5 (2004): 52-58; National Survey of Student Engagement, *From Promise to Progress: How Colleges and Universities Are Using Student Engagement Results to Improve Collegiate Quality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2002); Gary R. Pike, "Measuring Quality: A Comparison of *U.S. News* Rankings and NSSE Benchmarks," *Research in Higher Education* 45 (2004): 193-208.

31. Pascarella, Cruce, Wolniak, Kuh, Umbach, Hayek, Carini, Gonyea, and Zhao, "Institutional Selectivity."

32. E. Grady Bogue and Kimberly Bingham Hall, *Quality and Accountability in Higher Education: Improving Policy, Enhancing Performance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Peter T. Ewell, "An Emerging Scholarship: A Brief History of Assessment," *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*, ed. Trudy W. Banta et al. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002) 3-25.

33. Robert Zemsky's keynote address in "Academic Reforms in the World: Situation and Perspective in the Massification Stage of Higher Education (Reports of the 1997 Six-Nation Higher Education Project Seminar)," *RIHE International Seminar Reports* 10 (July 1997): 1-28. <[http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat/.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat\\_Id=17](http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/LibraryCat/.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat_Id=17)>.



**Selective and Non-Selective Alike:  
An Argument for the Superior Educational Effectiveness  
of Smaller Liberal Arts Colleges**

*Richard Ekman*

I want to thank the ACLS, the Oakley Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences at Williams College, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute for organizing this timely and important conference. The connections between the learned societies and the liberal arts colleges are of potentially enormous significance to the future of both sectors, and each of the five major sessions at the conference focuses on an important aspect of this relationship.

Other speakers have already explored the origins and evolution of liberal arts colleges in America, explaining how they have come to be what they are today. There may be an ideal type that most of us have in mind, but the fact is that very few institutions that call themselves liberal arts colleges correspond to the ideal. In the aggregate, they offer certain distinctive features: they are fairly small; they are governed and managed as private, nongovernmental institutions; they are purposeful about the values—religious and other—that led to their formation and, in many instances, that continue to shape their programs; they place enormous emphasis on teaching effectiveness; and they are based on a belief in the essential link between the learning that takes place through the formal curriculum and that which takes place during other aspects of students' experience. Finally, of course, they are grounded in the disciplines of the liberal arts.

Today, I want to lay out a “case” for the educational effectiveness of liberal arts colleges. My goal is not so much to be conclusive, but rather to persuade you of the value and essential correctness of the approach. And I want to conclude my remarks by listing four nagging worries—despite the bravado of the case I will have just made—and by posing two policy questions. There are many implications for public policy of the demonstrable educational effectiveness of liberal arts colleges, and two of these seem particularly important to mention at this conference.

To begin, then: Approximately 600 colleges and universities possess most of the characteristics noted above, but perhaps fewer than 30—that is, fewer than the 50 “medallion” institutions, in Robert Zemsky’s terminology<sup>1</sup>—institutions are strictly undergraduate, small, and offer programs exclusively in the liberal arts. An illustration can be found in the makeup of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), which is the national service organization for small and mid-sized private colleges and universities. In 1995, CIC had 411 institutional members, of which 172 (or 42 percent) were colleges of fewer than 1,000 students. Today, the membership is 529 institutions of which only 115 (or 22 percent) are below 1,000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students.<sup>2</sup> These changes in CIC’s membership are a barometer of what is happening in the demography of institutions of American higher education. New CIC members have come mainly from the ranks of institutions that offer master’s degrees, often in professional programs, while many continuing CIC member institutions have also changed from strictly undergraduate, liberal arts, small places into institutions of other sizes and shapes.

A word should be said about the predictions of extinction for small colleges. Each year, one or two colleges go out of business and the newspaper articles about these closures or mergers invariably treat them as the leading edge of a trend. However, the fact is that every year for the past 20 years, one or two new colleges have also been established. The number of colleges and universities today is actually slightly larger than 20 years ago. It is very difficult to kill

a college—they are flexible, entrepreneurial, and imaginative about new programs.

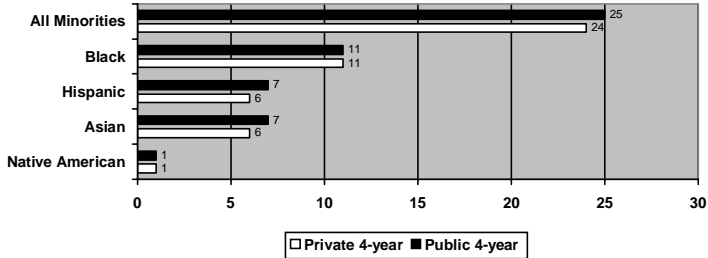
To be sure, some colleges are not of very high quality, and we should probably cheer when one of them closes. There is ample evidence, however, that the form of education provided by small, private, teaching-oriented, values-purposeful, liberal-arts-grounded institutions is more effective educationally than public institutions that are comparable in terms of the characteristics of entering students. We know, for example, that students from racial and ethnic minorities and from low- and middle-income backgrounds enroll in private four-year colleges and universities in about the same proportions as they do at public four-year colleges and universities (Figures A and B), but a student at a private institution has a much greater chance of completing a degree successfully than a student at a public institution (Figure C). It is of particular interest that the pattern of greater likelihood of completing a college degree is evident not only for well-prepared, affluent students, but also for those who start with lower levels of family income and/or academic credentials. That is, while students with very strong records in high school are more likely to have a successful college experience if they attend a private college or university than a public institution, the same is true for students with weaker high school academic records and low-income backgrounds (Figure D).

It is also the case that students with any of a variety of factors in their backgrounds that are commonly associated with lower likelihood of success in college—such as low-income, working full-time, having children while enrolled, first generation in college, racial minority—are much more likely to succeed in a private college or university than they are in a public university (Figures D, E, and F).

These patterns are important to note because they suggest that the form of education represented by the liberal arts college works well whether one is talking about a highly selective institution or a less selective one, an affluent student body or a low-income student body. If we are to argue successfully for the efficacy of our form of education, we need to argue, I think, that it can work for everyone.

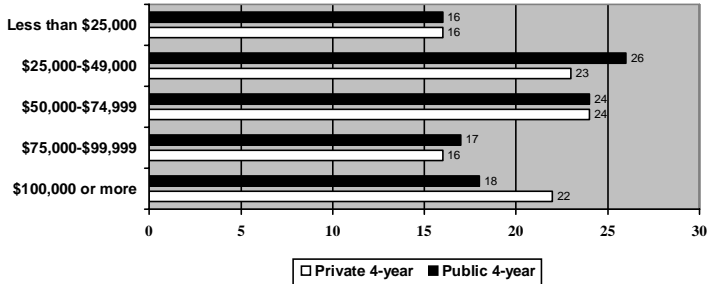
# Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education

**Figure A. Percentage of Students from Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds Attending Private versus Public 4-year Colleges and Universities (1999)**



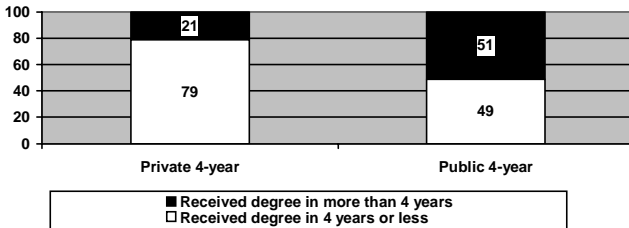
Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts That May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001. (Percentages calculated based on total enrollment.)

**Figure B. Percentage of Low- and Middle-Income Students Attending Private versus Public 4-year Colleges and Universities (1999-2000)**



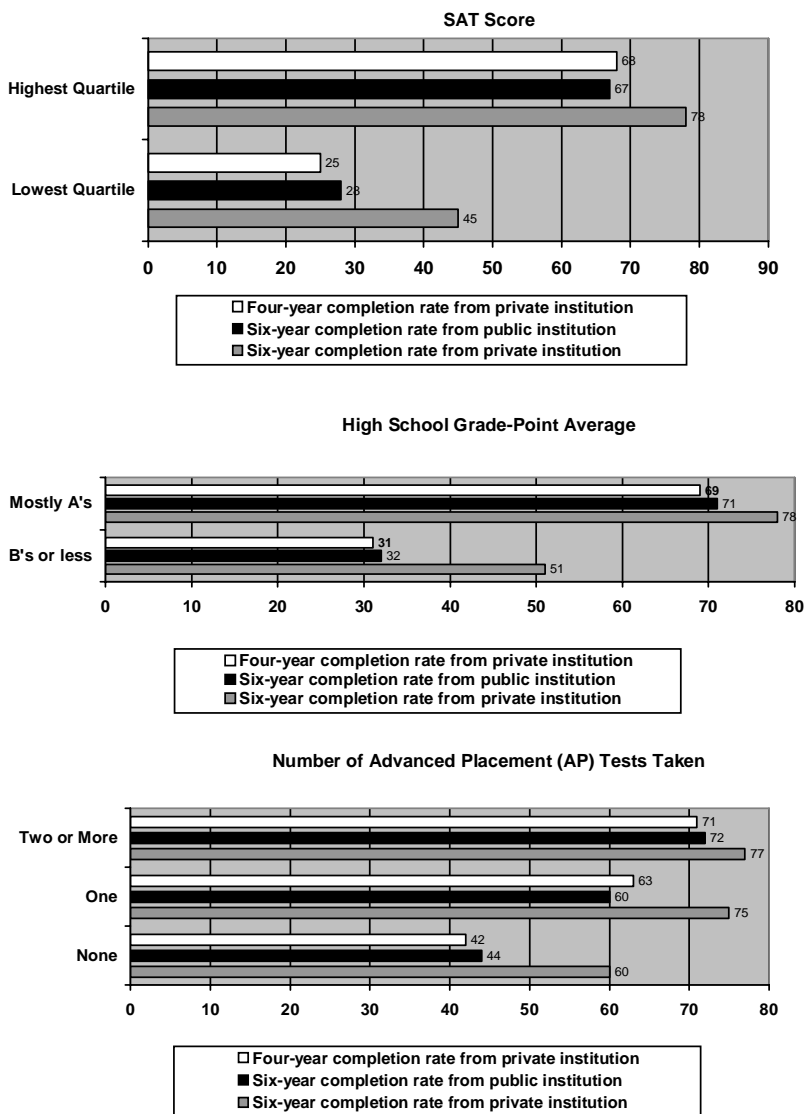
Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts that May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NPSAS: 1999-2000.

**Figure C. Time-To-Degree Percentages for Students Attending Private versus Public 4-year Colleges and Universities**



Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts that May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students Six Years Later*.

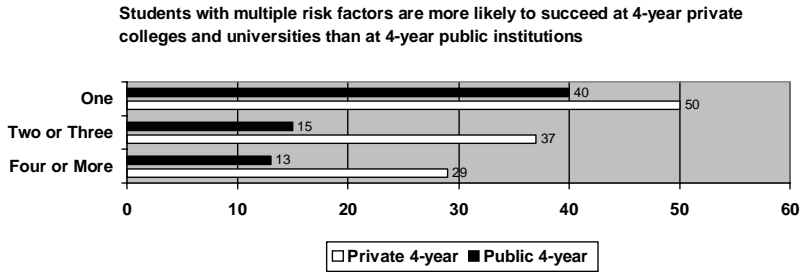
Figure D. Level of Academic Preparation and the Likelihood of Attaining a Degree from Private versus Public Colleges and Universities (percentages)



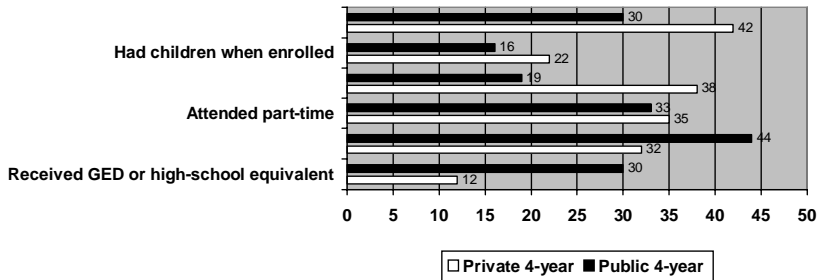
Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts that May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students Six Years Later*.

## Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education

**Figure E. Percentage of Students with Multiple Risk Factors Who Attain a Bachelor's Degree from Private versus Public Colleges and Universities**



Students with each risk factor are more likely to succeed at 4-year private colleges and universities than at 4-year public institutions



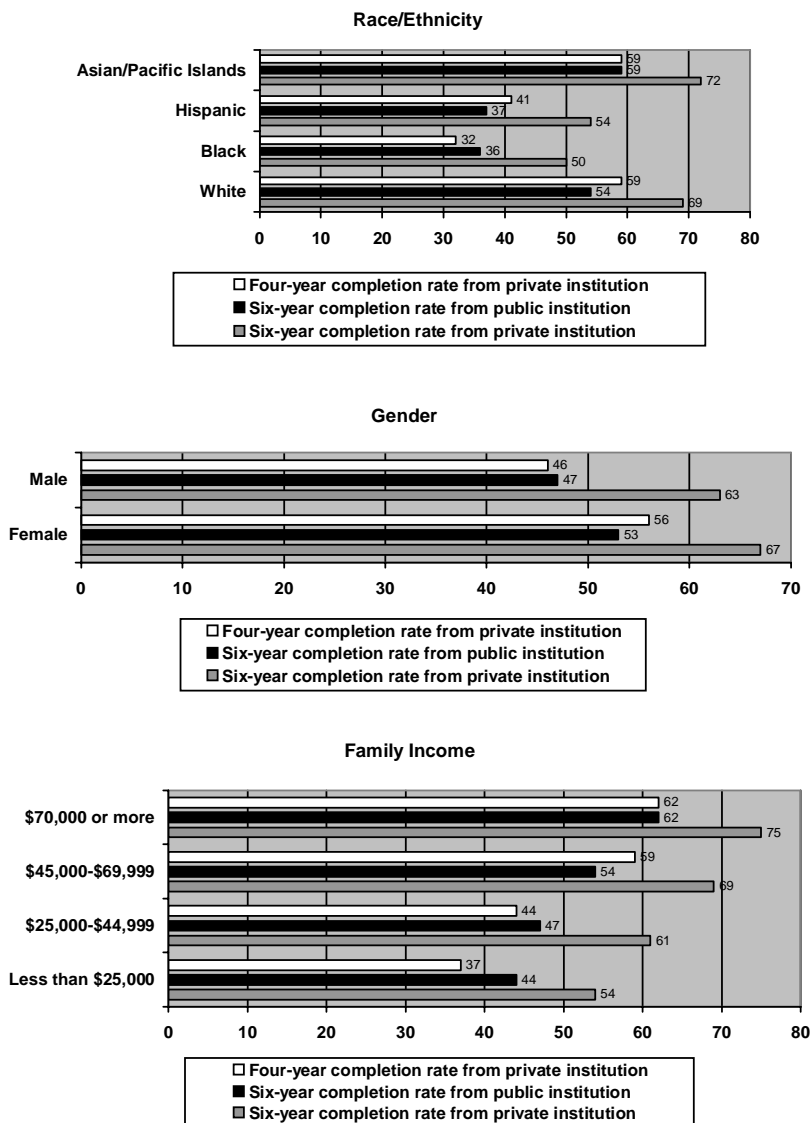
Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts that May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students Six Years Later*.

We live in an era of mass higher education. Of the 4.7 million 17-year-olds in the U.S. this year, 2.8 million or 60 percent will become college freshmen. The size of the college-going population is increasing; the high-school-graduation rate is increasing; and the college-going rate is increasing.

We need to persuade more people—parents, legislators, and journalists—that this form of education is better than the alternatives.

The evidence is available. There have been important recent efforts to examine what happens during the college years and to understand better why it is that students at certain kinds of colleges are more likely to succeed. George Kuh has assembled impressive

Figure F. Demographic Profile of Students Who Attain Their Degrees from Private versus Public Colleges and Universities (percentages)



Source: Modified from NAICU's *Twelve Facts that May Surprise You About America's Private Colleges and Universities*; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students Six Years Later*.

evidence, from surveying students at hundreds of institutions of varying types, that suggests that a student is much more likely to be engaged in the process of his or her own education at a small, private institution and that this engagement itself contributes to academic success. I will not attempt to repeat what Kuh has said, but I will say that his work is entirely persuasive to me. Kuh's conclusions are largely compatible with the work of Richard Light of Harvard University on patterns of success among the undergraduates whose records he examined. Light found, for example, that a student is more likely to succeed if (a) he or she has one-on-one contact outside the classroom with at least one faculty member, (b) he or she is involved in at least one extracurricular activity, and (c) he or she studies in groups or participates in collaborative learning exercises. One of the more important inferences to be drawn from both Kuh's work and Light's work is that the measurable effects of engagement are not closely correlated with "inputs" into undergraduate education, such as the wealth of the individual institution, the SAT score of the individual, or the average SAT score of entering students.

Not everyone has been persuaded by Kuh, however. Some have said that his National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) relies too heavily on students' accounts of what they do—that is, about the process of education. These critics believe that better measures of the effectiveness of liberal arts colleges can be obtained by focusing on something other than the activities of the process of learning, that results are what count.

One important effort examining results is a program developed recently by the Council for Aid to Education, now a subsidiary of the RAND Corporation. Under the leadership of Roger Benjamin, the Council's president and a former provost of the University of Minnesota, and Richard Hersh, a former president of Trinity College and Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the Council for Aid to Education has developed something called the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) project. The CLA consists of performance-based instruments and a method for assessing student learning that uses the institution as the unit of analysis and focuses on the "value added" that colleges and universities provide to



students. The unit of analysis for the CLA project is the institution, rather than the individual student, which helps the CLA avoid being regarded as yet another “high stakes” test for individual students. Rather, the CLA attempts to understand the institution’s role in promoting learning. The CLA measures students early and late in their college careers to see how much learning has taken place, and attempts to measure growth in intellectual skills—such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication—in a way that transcends the differences among individual colleges’ curricula and individual students’ majors. One performance measure, for example, asks a student to complete a real-life test, such as preparing a memo or a policy recommendation by using a series of documents that must be reviewed and evaluated. Completion of these instruments does not require the recall of particular facts or formulas, but instead measures the student’s ability to interpret, analyze, and synthesize. The second measure is of analytical writing and relies on an instrument that was developed by the Educational Testing Service. This instrument attempts to evaluate students’ ability to articulate complex ideas, examine claims of evidence, support ideas with relevant documentation, and of course use standard written English.

It is not my purpose today to serve as a salesman for the NSSE or CLA instruments, but let me simply say that the CLA has completed its pilot project and is now ready to “go public,” offering the instrument to any institution or group that wants to use it. Both NSSE and CLA have great diagnostic value for any college that wants to understand better how effective its undergraduate education is.

The CLA pilot project included 14 institutions: Bronx Community College; Carnegie Mellon University; Chapman University in California; Earlham, Wabash, and Goshen Colleges in Indiana; Hampshire College in Massachusetts; Indiana University in Bloomington; Indiana University–Purdue University in Indianapolis; Jackson State University; Macalester College; Pace University; Whitworth College, Pacific Lutheran University, Heritage College, Seattle Pacific University and Washington State University, Seattle; Trinity College in Connecticut; University of Charles-

ton in West Virginia; and University of Maine at Farmington. The pilot group was deliberately diverse in terms of types of institutions, students, and the documented intellectual abilities of entering students. The pilot showed that all students learned something during their college careers but that institutional effects varied a great deal. At some colleges, the average amount of student intellectual growth during the college years far exceeded the average of the other colleges. Most importantly for our purposes today, the pilot project suggested that the greatest amount of intellectual growth on the part of students takes place at smaller, private, liberal arts institutions—not in every case, but in enough for us to believe that there are important policy implications to this finding. If the findings hold up on a larger scale, they suggest that a student could learn more in four years at a liberal arts college than in six years at a public university. Given the longer average time-to-degree at public universities and the fact that most state governments are strapped for funds, this is a very important finding.

It may be helpful to explore a tangent at this point about the broader societal purposes served by all institutions of higher education: how do we know that the things that can be measured about the progress of students are the things worth measuring? We all know the platitudes of the purposes of undergraduate education—to prepare responsible citizens; to prepare people for productive, professional lives; to cultivate sensibilities; to pursue truth for its own sake. Believe me, I do not want to pursue a discussion in this vein: there have been too many faculty meetings in my life when the mission statement was up for reconsideration or the general education curriculum was being revised. But it is useful to remind ourselves that the subjects that are studied in our colleges and are considered appropriate to be taught by an institution devoted to the liberal arts actually do change over time, reflecting a public view of what broader purposes a college education is supposed to serve. The decline of ministerial training in the 19th century and of the study of the classics in the 20th have both been well documented. Today only 20 percent of liberal arts colleges teach classics, once thought to be a mandatory subject. The debates of the 19th century over the

inclusion of the physical sciences in the curriculum, as described (hilariously) in Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, are echoed in the more recent debates over the teaching of computer science and business management as parts of the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum.

Let us focus for a minute on the role of liberal arts colleges in meeting one social goal—preparing scientists. For at least 50 years, there has been widespread public recognition that the country needs more scientists. These claims, bolstered by the federal government, have been put forward in terms of defense, economic development, and the search for better products—food, clothing, medical equipment, and drugs—all for the betterment of mankind. Those strident public arguments may be less visible now, but the need for more scientists continues to be articulated by almost everyone.

Liberal arts colleges have produced disproportionate numbers of career scientists, as the surveys conducted by Oberlin and Franklin & Marshall Colleges have shown over the years. This fact alone ought to be grounds for enormous federal investment in small colleges. What has not been as obvious has been the role of less well-known liberal arts colleges in meeting the national need for scientists. For example, Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania has a biology department that in 1985 consisted of six faculty members and 73 majors. Now it has nine faculty members and 195 majors. Elon University in North Carolina has steadily increased the number of mathematics majors, with two (of 10) majors going to graduate school in math in the year 2000, three (of nine) going to graduate school in 2001, four (of 12) in 2002, and eight (of 12) in 2003. Hendrix College in Arkansas ranks 24th in the nation in the number of its graduates per total enrollment who have received Ph.D.s in chemistry. Most dramatic may be Whitworth College in Washington State, which has increased the number of physics majors by almost 400 percent in five years, from 11 in 1997 to 41 in 2002.

I happen to know about these lesser-known liberal arts colleges that are doing such a good job of producing career scientists because

the Council of Independent Colleges has, for the past three years, run a prize program that recognizes outstanding achievement in undergraduate science education. What has been interesting about the applicant pool for these Heuer Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Undergraduate Science Education (as they are called) is that only five out of the 60 institutions that were nominated in 2002 and eight out of the 47 institutions nominated in 2003 had enrollment of over 3,000 students. Almost all of the institutions that have good reason to believe that they are making significant contributions to society's need for high-quality career scientists are very small.

Relying on an analysis of the process of education, as NSSE does, or measures of intellectual growth during college, as RAND's CLA does, or tallies of increases in the number of majors in particular fields may help us understand our successes and failures in meeting short-term goals, but it does less to illuminate the longer term social impact of liberal arts colleges in comparison with other kinds of colleges and universities.

Longitudinal studies of the graduates of colleges and universities are, regrettably, not numerous. Some of the best are those that have been undertaken by William G. Bowen and his colleagues at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation on the long-term effects of college on such groups as student athletes and minority students. I know something about Bowen's efforts to obtain reliable data from colleges and universities for these projects and how difficult it was, even with the deep pockets of an independent foundation to cover the costs incurred in researching registrar, admissions, and alumni records. We need many more studies of the long-term effects of particular colleges and universities, as well as of groups of them. Colleges and universities must begin to keep better records of students and alumni and maintain them for very long periods or we will never have the kind of conclusive proof we need of the effects of the college.

There have nonetheless been several useful studies of alumni. For example, the Hardwick-Day consulting firm in Minneapolis, over

the past decade, has tried to document the outcomes of college through telephone surveys of alumni who graduated at least five years earlier. Hardwick-Day has conducted these assessments for several different groups of colleges and universities—totaling several hundred institutions and nearly 6,000 individual alumni. For each of these projects, Hardwick-Day also interviewed a representative sample of graduates of public institutions in order to draw comparisons. At various times over the past decade, Hardwick-Day has worked with the Annapolis Group, a group of 117 both highly selective and moderately selective colleges; the Great Lakes Colleges Association, a group of 12 Midwestern liberal arts colleges; the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, an association of 107 private institutions of varying degrees of selectivity and affluence, all with explicit religious commitments; and the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America, a group of 43 institutions, all affiliated with one of the several Lutheran denominations, and varying in their degrees of selectivity, affluence, and religious identity.

Let me provide one example of what Hardwick-Day found. Interviewers asked alumni to indicate whether at the college they attended, they “benefited very much from a good balance between academics, social, and personal development.” In the Annapolis Group survey, 37 percent of the respondents said that they had, in comparison with 22 percent of those sampled from national flagship public universities and 16 percent from regional public universities (Figure G). When Hardwick-Day interviewers posed the same question to alumni of member institutions of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, 45 percent responded affirmatively, but only 20 percent of the sample from the flagship public universities and 13 percent from the regional public institutions responded affirmatively (Figure H).

It is important to remember that the samples of public institutions were different in the two studies, so comparisons cannot be made in too fine a manner. The other caveat is that these are surveys of alumni, years after graduation, of what they recall. Their recollections may not be accurate and, without correlations of these

views with the records of the interviewees while they were students and subsequently, we can rely on the results only as rough indicators. But the percentage differences are too large to ignore.

A second question posed by Hardwick-Day interviewers asked respondents about the proposition that “college was highly effective with helping students learn to think analytically.” The results again showed that the alumni of private colleges and universities believe that they had gained much more from college than those in the other sample groups (Figures G, H, I, and J).

That is the essence of the case for the educational effectiveness of liberal arts colleges. In summary: (1) Students are more likely to succeed at a small, private college, including students with characteristics that often correlate with lower success rates. (2) Students are more actively engaged and (3) do appear to learn more at liberal arts colleges. (4) There appears to be a relationship between the amount of engagement and the amount of learning. (5) Five years or longer after graduation, alumni of liberal arts colleges believe they learned more about analytical thinking and gained a stronger sense of morality and/or civic responsibility than alumni of other kinds of colleges and universities.

But there are some uncomfortable, unresolved issues lurking just beneath the surface of these otherwise reassuring generalizations about the effectiveness of our institutions. Let me raise just four of them.

1. *Liberal arts colleges make ambitious claims about what they can accomplish in preparing people for lives of responsible civic involvement.* It is true that small, private institutions have been the vanguard for all of higher education in such innovations as service learning, community engagement, and other efforts to connect the formal curriculum with broader social applications. However, there is disquieting evidence that the community engagement activities of liberal arts colleges are often not linked by students with what they have learned in the formal curriculum.

Project Pericles, the brainchild of philanthropist Eugene Lang, has been working with 10 carefully selected colleges to strengthen

**Figure G. Summarized Data for the Annapolis Group in Comparison with Other Institutions—Taken from Hardwick-Day’s Alumni Survey**

|   | <b>Annapolis Group</b> | <b>National Flagship Publics</b> | <b>Regional Publics</b> |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Question 1:</b> Benefited very much from a good balance between academics, social, and personal development        | 37                     | 22                               | 16                      |
| <b>Question 2:</b> College was highly effective with helping students learn to think analytically                     | 56                     | 27                               | 23                      |
| <b>Question 3:</b> College was highly effective with helping students develop moral principles that can guide actions | 28                     | 11                               | 12                      |
| <b>Question 4:</b> Participated in faculty-directed research or independent study                                     | 63                     | 38                               | 38                      |
| <b>Question 5:</b> Benefited very much from an emphasis on personal values and ethics                                 | 37                     | 11                               | 11                      |
| <b>Question 6:</b> Experience often included integration of values and ethics in classroom discussions                | 50                     | 28                               | 32                      |

Source: Hardwick-Day

**Figure H. Summarized Data for the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCC&U) in Comparison with Other Institutions—Taken from Hardwick Day’s Alumni Survey**

|   | <b>Council of Christian Colleges &amp; Universities</b> | <b>National Flagship Publics</b> | <b>Non-Flagship Publics</b> |
|---|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Question 1:</b> Benefited very much from a good balance between academics, social, and personal development        | 45  | 20                               | 13                          |
| <b>Question 2:</b> College was highly effective with helping students learn to think analytically                     | 77  | 77                               | 66                          |
| <b>Question 3:</b> College was highly effective with helping students develop moral principles that can guide actions | 95  | 30                               | 38                          |
| <b>Question 4:</b> Participated in faculty-directed research or independent study                                     | 44  | 38                               | 38                          |
| <b>Question 5:</b> Benefited very much from an emphasis on personal values and ethics                                 | 82  | 8                                | 14                          |
| <b>Question 6:</b> Experience often included integration of values and ethics in classroom discussions                | 87  | 25                               | 34                          |

Source: Hardwick-Day

## Liberal Arts Colleges in American Higher Education

**Figure I. Summarized Data for the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) in Comparison with Other Institutions—Taken from Hardwick-Day’s Alumni Survey**

|  | Great Lakes Colleges Association | Top 50 National Publics | National Publics in IN, OH, MI |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Question 1:</b> College was highly effective with helping students learn to think analytically      | 87                               | 79                      | 75                             |
| <b>Question 2:</b> Participated in faculty-directed research or independent study                      | 74                               | 30                      | 35                             |
| <b>Question 3:</b> Experience often included integration of values and ethics in classroom discussions | 56                               | 22                      | 23                             |

Source: Hardwick-Day

**Figure J. Summarized Data for the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) in Comparison with Other Institutions—Taken from Hardwick-Day’s Alumni Survey**

|   | Lutheran Educational Conference of North America | National Flagship Publics |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| <b>Question 1:</b> College was highly effective with helping students learn to think analytically | 75   | 77                        |

Source: Hardwick-Day

the connections between a liberal arts education and increased civic participation. The 10 institutions in Project Pericles are Swarthmore College, Bethune-Cookman College, Pace University, Allegheny College, New England College, Elon University, Pitzer College, Macalester College, Hampshire College, and Ursinus College—a diverse group.<sup>3</sup> Lang launched Project Pericles because he believes in the power of the liberal arts to foster a sense of civic responsibility, and he believes that the future of democracy is tied to the kind of heightened citizenship that results from a liberal arts education, when pursued in the best manner. Lang was troubled by the statistics that show declining rates of voting, particularly among young people. In the project, faculty members, students, boards of trustees, presidents, and deans have all been engaged. Each of the participating colleges’ boards of trustees, for example, has been required to pass a resolution endorsing the college’s adherence to



the principles of Project Pericles.

2. *Liberal arts colleges may be preparing students for responsible “citizenship” but the colleges often claim that they are preparing “leaders.”* The language of college as preparation for “leadership” has become one of the new clichés of higher education. Let me illustrate what I mean. In the state of Georgia, the first of the state government-funded “merit” scholarship programs was established in 1993. Called the HOPE scholarship, its justification in the legislative language is that Georgia needs to prepare the next generation of “leaders” of the state, assuring that the brightest high school graduates go to college. The HOPE scholarships were intended to assure, moreover, that these individuals would attend college in Georgia—to prevent “brain drain” from the state. At first, an “A” average in high school qualified a student for a HOPE scholarship. The program proved to be very popular, and the rules were soon amended to allow anyone with a “B” average in high school to qualify for a HOPE scholarship. Two-thirds of all Georgia high school graduates now qualify.

This is hardly a program to train “leaders.” In an era of mass access to higher education, the HOPE scholarship is a welcome (if modest) source of financial aid for many. If the public policy goal of this program had been to make college-going nearly universal—a worthy goal, certainly, in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson’s mythical yeoman farmer who reads philosophy as he plows the fields and is a better citizen in a democracy as a result—one could praise the HOPE scholarship without reservation. But last month, the newspapers reported that 39 percent of the HOPE scholars have been unable to attain GPAs in college that are sufficient to retain eligibility for the scholarship. No one should be surprised.

3. *While we have been documenting the effectiveness of small private institutions in comparison with large, impersonal, public universities, there have been important experiments underway concerning the use of technology and distance learning.* I do not believe that distance education is a direct threat to small colleges that place a premium

on live interaction among students and faculty members. The main threat of distance learning is to large, already impersonal institutions. One of the most significant of the natural experiments is the work supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts and led by Carol Twigg of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in which introductory courses at a variety of large universities have been recast so that they can be offered on a largely technological basis.<sup>4</sup> These are the courses that, in the big universities, usually have enormous attrition rates and serve as “gatekeepers” for entry into particular fields—Calculus 101, Accounting 101, Chemistry 101, Psychology 101, and so on. Twigg has found not only that it is less expensive to offer the courses through the use of technology, but also that, when carefully planned, computer-based tutorials allow students to learn at their own pace, and to do extra work in order to master material that might have been unclear the first time through. The preliminary results of Twigg’s project indicate that students do learn more, have higher course completion rates, and do not drop out of college—in comparison with traditional large university instruction. The cost of instruction is also significantly lower than that of traditional pedagogies. If what Twigg has done is valid, the superior effectiveness of technology-based education over large universities is clear, but the relationship of this project to the claims we make for the educational effects of small, private, teaching-oriented institutions is less clear.

4. *In spite of these sources of anxiety, liberal arts colleges must be doing something right, for we are being imitated all the time.* The University of Minnesota, a gargantuan institution, now has—incredibly—in its admissions materials many references to the personal attention that students receive. A number of public universities have established honors colleges within the university that offer a small cohort of students greater access to senior faculty, special residence halls, and other enhancements that make the total experience look very much like what a small liberal arts college has to offer. And there are also 19 state-supported, freestanding, small liberal arts colleges, including Saint Mary’s College in Maryland,

Evergreen State College in Washington, the University of North Carolina at Asheville, and of course the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Beyond the policy question of equitable use of state funds (a question all taxpayers should be raising), we should ask how these state-supported copies of our kind of institutions are doing? We need to ask whether there is anything in our privateness—or in our willingness to be explicit about particular values that are part of the college's traditions and educational philosophy—that makes us different.

Let me conclude by posing two policy questions for us to ponder. The first is that, if our form of undergraduate education works so well, why can't it be offered to everyone? The answer is that it is more expensive; we spend more per enrolled student than public universities do. But we offer significant amounts of private financial aid at our colleges, and we can claim a much higher degree completion rate among students. With state budgets under stress and tax revenues reduced, now may be the time to call for a fresh discussion that could lead to an increased role for liberal arts colleges in all of American undergraduate education.

Despite the evidence, many of those in charge of public policy for higher education in the state and federal governments refuse to acknowledge openly that the price of a private college education is usually no more than the price of a public university education.

Consider this illustration:<sup>5</sup> the average price of a year at a private college, after financial aid has been factored in, is approximately \$8,900. After four years, the outlay is \$35,600. The average price of a year at a public university after financial aid has been factored in is approximately \$2,700. But the four-year graduation rate at public universities is dismal, so any calculation of average price should include a fifth and even a sixth year. Six years at \$2,700 per year equals \$16,200. The student at a public university has also lost two years of earnings, at an average annual salary of \$27,000. The true price of the public university degree, therefore, is \$16,200 in tuition and \$54,000 in foregone earnings—\$70,200, versus \$35,600 at a private college.

The second—and final—policy question that I want to pose has to do with the nature of the liberal arts and the role of learned societies. Very few colleges and universities teach only the liberal arts these days, and it is eminently reasonable—as Ernest Boyer advocated shortly before he died—to expect a college or university to address the two separate parts of a student’s aspirations—the hope to obtain a good general education, on the one hand, and the expectation of preparation for a particular profession or professional school, on the other. But not everything that one studies is the same as everything else. The arts and sciences are special. A course of study that is dominated by courses in business management, journalism, or nursing will not provide the same educational benefits as one that is grounded in history, literature, physics, or psychology. Moreover, in liberal arts colleges, we pride ourselves on our success in helping students integrate what they have learned, and it is relatively easy at a liberal arts college to launch an interdisciplinary program, whether combining fields within the arts and sciences, such as history and literature, or fields that span the liberal arts and the professions, such as business and literature.

In our enthusiasm for the integrative character of education at liberal arts colleges, we sometimes understate the reasons why the arts and sciences are the best vehicles for liberal education. There has been a tendency in recent years, for example, for some to take the view that “liberal learning” does not require exposure to particular subject matters, and can be achieved instead through the study of *any* field if it is taught in ways that encourage students to be reflective and analytical. To cite one extreme example, a course in accounting is said to foster liberal learning as effectively as a course in history if students have a chance in class to discuss social issues surrounding the accounting profession. The increasing acceptance of this view ought to concern us. In particular, at this conference it ought to provide us with a wake-up call for learned societies about the connection between the integrity of disciplines and the goals of undergraduate education.

## Notes

1. See for example Robert Zemsky's keynote address in "Academic Reforms in the World: Situation and Perspective in the Massification Stage of Higher Education (Reports of the 1997 Six-Nation Higher Education Project Seminar)," *RIHE International Seminar Reports 10* (July 1997): 1-28. <[http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/libraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat\\_Id=17](http://www.irhe.upenn.edu/libraryCat.php?CatName=Research%20Reports&Cat_Id=17)>.
2. In December 2004, membership was 542 with only 101 institutions below 1,000 FTE.
3. In 2004, Berea College, Chatham College, Dillard University, Rhodes College, Wagner College, and Widener University joined Project Pericles.
4. The project is now based at the independent National Center for Academic Transformation.
5. Based on 1995-96 National Center for Education Statistics data analyzed by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

## Response

*Mitchell J. Chang*

It is a privilege and honor for me to be part of this very stimulating and distinguished conference. This opportunity is unique for me in two distinct ways. First, I am rarely offered the chance to respond to the work of one, let alone two, giants in the field of higher education, in this case George Kuh and Richard Ekman. Second, I rarely have the privilege to be in the good company of so many humanists and to hear from and dialogue with you. Both are indeed rare opportunities for me and subsequently have forced me to think in fresh ways. One of my fresh thoughts is that I have somehow missed out in life. After hearing yesterday's speakers, I not only wish I had studied at a liberal arts college but also wish to work at one as a humanist. Perhaps it's not too late for me.

Let me first be clear that I am responding to early drafts of Kuh's and Ekman's papers, so what you heard from them today may be slightly different from what I reviewed. From what I read, it seems to me that both papers address the important question, "Do liberal arts colleges add unique value to their undergraduate students' learning and educational experiences?" In other words, do liberal arts colleges have a right to claim that they offer a distinct learning environment? The arguments and evidence presented in both papers would strongly suggest that indeed they do. This is certainly an instrumental body of evidence that supporters of liberal arts colleges can use to inform a public who seem to have a poor sense of the individual and broader social benefits of attending a liberal

arts college. Such findings, I'm sure, are not surprising to this audience who know firsthand how those institutions add educational value, so I do not need to drive this point home any further here.

There is another way to look at some of the arguments and findings reported in Kuh's and Ekman's papers, which tells a less flattering story. It may not be how we like to think of our colleges, but it is an interesting perspective to consider when contemplating the relevance of liberal arts colleges in a complex and diverse system of higher education, which serves a national population that is becoming increasingly more diverse. Another story that emerged for me in the findings is a set of interesting contradictions of which I will point to three. I believe these contradictions undermine any attempt to assert the relevance of liberal arts colleges in larger public debates.

There is a widespread perception, as one of the conference speakers noted yesterday, that liberal arts colleges offer an "elite" education, which, as many of us know, is not really the case. Still, liberal arts colleges are more likely than colleges in other sectors of higher education to offer smaller classes and smaller faculty-to-student ratios. Likewise, students who attend liberal arts colleges are on average more likely to attend full-time, to work less to support themselves financially, and to be more engaged in campus life. These privileges or "elite" aspects of liberal arts colleges seem to conflict with the politically popular idea of mass higher education. The current political rhetoric regarding mass higher education does not target those privileged groups who already have the best chances of attending college but targets those who tend to be older, children of non-college-educated parents, racial/ethnic minorities, and economically disadvantaged. When this "nontraditional" group of students arrives on campus, they tend to work more for pay, commute, take longer to complete their degree, and seek professional training. The disconnect between the perceived "elitism" of liberal arts colleges and the popular idea of mass higher education is not in itself problematic, unless supporters of liberal arts colleges wish to assert their relevance in the larger public sphere.

Right now, few if any politicians have factored in liberal arts colleges as part of their strategy for increasing access to higher education, which is a recurring top priority.

The second contradiction is really a statistical one, but has practical implications. As noted earlier, the arguments and findings in Kuh's and Ekman's papers suggest that there is a statistical advantage on a number of key student outcomes in attending a liberal arts college. For example, students who attend a liberal arts college, as opposed to those who attend other types of colleges, report greater gains on average in their character development. However, when researchers use multilevel statistical models to parse out student-level effects to examine the institution-level ones, we often learn that what students actually do while they are in college matters more than the characteristics of their respective institutions. In other words, 80 percent of the variance on most student outcomes is explained by within-institution differences between students rather than by between-institution differences across colleges. So, even though there is a net statistical advantage to attending a liberal arts college, not all students at those institutions reap the advantages; in fact, there is considerable student variance within institutions when it comes to achieving benefits. In short, a considerable number of students who attend liberal arts colleges are missing out on the educational advantages of being in such an environment.

One important net advantage, identified in Kuh's paper, is that students who attend liberal arts colleges tend to report a higher frequency of experiences with diversity and to make more progress in understanding people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, there are proportionally fewer African Americans and Latinos who attend liberal arts colleges, and of those students of color who do enroll in this sector, they are more likely than their white counterparts to report that they did not find the environment to be supportive or welcoming. Stephan Macedo makes a compelling case for why addressing this contradiction associated with diversity is absolutely critical.<sup>1</sup> He argues that the health of our political society (liberal democracy) requires that educational insti-



tutions intentionally provide students with the opportunity to learn how to negotiate cultural boundaries and promote wider sympathies among citizens. If liberal arts colleges can bring together young adults with the different normative perspectives that compose our society, then they will be better suited than any other sector in higher education to provide a setting where students can engage in three key experiences identified by Macedo: (1) encountering difference in a respectful way, (2) learning about one another, and (3) discovering that differences do not preclude cooperation and mutual respect among participants in a shared community.

It is perhaps self-evident to this group that liberal arts colleges have a claim to distinction, and indeed, the empirical evidence seems to support the right to make such a claim. Effectively asserting this claim, however, is somewhat different from having a right to make it, and my response draws from Kuh's and Ekman's research and insights to identify some areas of contradiction that can potentially weaken the claims made in the public sphere. In order to properly address those apparent contradictions, a good dose of political, conceptual, and perhaps most important, practical campus efforts are necessary. In the long run, strengthening the claim will improve not only the perceived relevance of liberal arts colleges, but also their added value to students' learning and educational experiences.

### Note

1. Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multi-cultural Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000)



### III. THE FUTURE

#### FIVE PRESIDENTS ON THE CHALLENGES LYING AHEAD

## The Challenges Facing Public Liberal Arts Colleges

*Mary K. Grant*

It is a pleasure to be here with you today and to take part in such thoughtful discussion. It is a wonderful change of pace. In the 14 months that I have been president of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), I have not had much time for reflection or to engage with such insightful and experienced colleagues as those who have gathered for this important conference.

One little problem with all of this reflecting is that it has left me a bit more worried than I had been about the many challenges facing public liberal arts colleges—and closer to home, the many challenges facing my own institution. And I do mean my own institution. As an alumna of MCLA, I know firsthand the difference that this wonderful institution makes in the lives of our students—I could spend hours talking about my alma mater (but I promise you I won't) and how everyday working-class kids just like me receive a first-class education at MCLA—an education that is student centered, intellectually engaging, and much more, as noted by Alexander Astin, than “a collection of course credits.”<sup>1</sup>

MCLA has served the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for over 100 years. Founded in 1894 as the North Adams Normal School, our mission and identity have evolved from the Normal School, to the State Teachers College at North Adams, to North Adams State College—a four-year comprehensive college. In 1992 North Adams State College adopted a more focused liberal arts and sciences mission—with a goal of offering students an educational

experience comparable to that of a private liberal arts college—but at a more reasonable cost. In focusing on liberal arts, the college reaffirmed its historical commitment to the dual importance of liberal education and professional preparation.

In 1993 the college was designated by the commonwealth as a Public Liberal Arts College—we raised admission standards, began a revision of our general education curriculum, introduced a three-year residency requirement, and expanded and improved upon the campus physical plant. And in 1997, we were granted legislative permission to change our name to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts—MCLA.

In 1999 MCLA was invited to become a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC)—a group of 20 or so public colleges and universities that share a commitment to liberal education as the best foundation for professional and personal success. Other council members include Evergreen State College, St. Mary's College of Maryland, the New School in Florida, and the State University of New York, College at Geneseo, to name a few.

During the time frame in which the college was beginning to work through institutional and curricular changes, the state economy in Massachusetts was still fairly robust. Although the commonwealth signed off on the targeted mission and the new name, resources were not forthcoming to support MCLA in making the shift in mission or even in marketing the new name. During this same period, the state was investing millions of dollars in reforming K-12 education. However, policy makers failed to make the connection that the commitment to 12th graders should not end upon graduation from high school and that access to a strong system of public higher education would be a logical progression.

Access continues to be a driving concern for MCLA and for public liberal arts colleges. COPLAC's mission statement would describe this concern for access as having its origins in the Morrill Act “which brought public-land grant colleges into being to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.” There is little doubt that the mission of access must be matched by high quality.

Access and quality remain a growing concern. As we ushered in this new century, we did so in a climate in which public higher education budgets in Massachusetts were cut by \$140 million. In stepping into the role of president, I was fully aware that MCLA faced great challenges but I was—and still am—equally aware of the great possibilities and opportunities that lie ahead.

What I did not expect was:

- That collective bargaining contracts, which had been negotiated and signed with our two staff unions, would be rejected for funding by the outgoing governor [Jane Swift];
- Or that our budget would be cut twice during the academic year;
- Or that the newly elected governor [Mitt Romney], would propose complete reorganization of the public higher education system—including the prospect of closing and or merging a handful of the state and community colleges;
- Additionally, higher education budgets for state fiscal year 2004 were cut by close to 15 percent.

Simply put, it has not been a good time for public higher education.

For Massachusetts this is a gross understatement—as a result of several years of budget cuts and a difficult state economy, we rank 49th in per-capita spending on public higher education.

During Frank Oakley's address, he discussed, among many rich points, the issue of identity. The issue of identity is worrisome for public liberal arts colleges. Not only are we subject to reductions in our budgets as a means to balance state accounts, increasingly we are subject to growing levels of public scrutiny and political control. While public and private liberal arts colleges alike run the risk of veering from mission in pursuit of dollars, the identity of a public institution can be challenged each time there is an election. Unfortunately, it is not good enough that we are producing the next generation of leaders at very affordable rates. We must meet (and I might add we do) levels of success and accountability established

and monitored by administrators who, by virtue of their role, are often in the uncomfortable position of regulator rather than advocate.

Recently we have been wrestling with mandated performance measures that include:

- Cost effective use of resources and efficient fiscal management;
- Collaboration with other regional public higher education institutions that save money;
- The role that we play in workforce development;
- Enrollment and graduation rates;
- Access and affordability (a particularly troubling institutional measure as when there is little control over the level of funding received);
- Submission of reports in a timely fashion; and
- Improvement on performance accountability objectives.

As president, I support establishing institutional measures of success. We should set goals and then we absolutely should assess how we are doing in meeting these goals and what we must do to improve. Likewise, we can also benefit from understanding how others measure success and compare how we are doing compared to similar institutions. Of great concern, however, is how this information might be used: data taken out of context or used by those unfamiliar with the particulars of a college can cause great harm. While we are concerned about how these measures will be used, we are equally concerned about suggested use of labels such as “performing” and “underperforming”—labels that have been associated with K-12 systems. Application of these labels to a higher education institution could cause irreparable damage. They can also demean our hard-working students and their families and devalue the credentials awarded to our alumni. As students compare and contrast colleges, they are not likely to select a school that carries a label of “underperforming”—even if the label is attached to a seemingly benign measure like timely submission of paperwork.

Budget cuts are only one piece of the puzzle affecting public higher education. William Massy notes,

New opportunities, driven by information technology and market demand, will challenge traditional modes of operation . . . [C]ompetition within the education market challenges local monopolies and erodes financial margins . . . [N]ew ways of looking at quality and cost can open the way for improvement, but they will require a reshaping of traditional academic values. Schools that learn to meet these challenges will find exciting new opportunities. And those that don't will fail to be the best they can be, and they run the risk of becoming increasingly marginalized.<sup>2</sup>

Now don't get me wrong. We are always looking at ways to reduce costs, to increase revenues, and to improve quality—and we should. But as we are looking at individual institutional improvements, we should engage in serious discussions concerning how we as a state (and a nation) value public higher education, and more specifically, a liberal arts education.

Over the last 12 years, Massachusetts has had three governors and one acting governor. With each election there often comes a new team of administrators—some who may have little interest in higher education, and others who may believe that higher education needs to be reformed. In Massachusetts, higher education is segmental, comprised of the university, the state colleges, and the community colleges. This segmentation has contributed in part to frustration regarding resource allocation and has made louder the call for increased accountability.

The substantial literature concerning the challenge of change holds true within the academy. It is certainly a challenge to make real change within an academic department, or within one college. Therefore it is not a reach to imagine the difficulties inherent in trying to encourage or insist that 29 public institutions work together as one system. The measures of success at a larger, urban



comprehensive college will be different than those of a community college or a small, rural, liberal arts college.

A one-size-fits-all approach to a system of higher education may help make data collection a more uniform task, but could impede institutional creativity which, now more than ever, is a critically important tool as campuses work hard to fulfill their missions in a time of declining resources.

In the absence of resources, we have to be creative, and we have to find ways to remove barriers to creativity. The greatest strength at MCLA is the deep commitment of the faculty and the staff to the college and our students. We must do all that we can to encourage and reward the creative and inspired work that goes on every day.

As a president and educator, I do worry about the dumbing-down of public higher education—I worry that we are creating a situation in which those with resources will have access to a higher quality of education and those of more limited means will find that the doors to education are not open to them, or that their choices are limited not by talent but by economics. As a president, I am concerned about running a high-quality institution—my definition of high quality is more compatible with Boyer’s in that “we are concerned about outcomes, that we ask questions that go beyond evaluation of skills, that our students are well informed and can apply what they have learned, and that we inspire our graduates with a larger vision so that they use the knowledge acquired to form values and address common good.”<sup>3</sup>

When Frank Oakley made reference to college presidents standing in an intersection, I recognized that place. I have actually described that intersection as one of danger and excitement. At this intersection, we are faced with competing interests and challenges. One thing is certain, however—we must continue to promote the importance of the liberal arts in preparing our students to become leaders in an increasingly complex world.

We must promote liberal arts as the foundation upon which to build a lifetime of learning and professional opportunities, and to clarify that even within our small college of liberal arts we have strong, well-rounded, professional programs where our students

learn not just about the bottom line but about ethics, social values, and civic engagement. The challenge is not only to promote the liberal arts, but to do so in a way that convinces the stakeholders that a good education is a sound investment.

As a public institution, we must make the case for excellence while promoting ourselves as part of the engine that will help turn around a lackluster economy. As we have engaged in reeducating policy makers, politicians, and the public about the value of a liberal arts education, we have also engaged in a campaign to remind them of the following:

- As a public institution, MCLA fulfills our historical mission of providing access to higher education to people of all backgrounds, which, as Horace Mann believed, is critical to the functioning of democratic government.
- Many of the students we serve continue to be first-generation college students for whom a public liberal arts education is their best option, with private colleges and universities increasingly out of the financial reach of most middle- and lower-income families.

We have had to remind the decision makers that:

- Two-thirds of Massachusetts high school seniors who go on to college in Massachusetts do so at a public university or college.
- A Massachusetts state college education remains affordable. While the cost has gone up, a state college education is one of the few bargains available to Massachusetts residents. For example, the cost of attending the University of New Hampshire is now close to \$8,600, the University of Connecticut is roughly \$6,800, and MCLA is roughly \$5,400 per year.

- An investment in public liberal arts education pays dividends for the Massachusetts economy. We educate tomorrow's workforce and shape our next generation of leaders, and we know that those with a B.A. earn significantly more than those without.
- Eighty percent of our state college graduates remain in Massachusetts. These alumni go on to contribute to the state economy, and they make a difference in their professions and local communities.

While public higher education may serve as a pathway to jobs, it is also the great equalizer—and it is essential to sustaining a true democracy.

For residents of Berkshire County, MCLA represents the best chance for upward mobility—from completing education, to renewing skills, to partaking of lifelong learning. We can't underestimate the value of this public liberal arts education. We can't underestimate the importance of teaching someone to pull apart a problem, to understand different opinions, to think, to reason, and to communicate clearly.

These skills increasingly will be important in this 21<sup>st</sup> century as we continue to wrestle with new world orders, free trade, emerging democracies, disease, and poverty—and the many other challenges inherent in a global society. As Lyndon Baines Johnson said, we are in a race between education and chaos, and education—more than any other single force—will mold the citizen of the future. It is the classroom, not the trench, that is the true frontier of freedom.

While William Massy has discussed the necessity of change and the need for improvement within higher education, he also offers that “Higher education institutions that are genuinely trying to improve must be supported—even if their current performance is perceived as less than perfect. The challenge is to stimulate improvement and document its achievement without stripping away the autonomy institutions need in order to function effectively.”<sup>4</sup>

At MCLA, given our size and our mission, every day we have the opportunity for meaningful engagement and the chance to build learning relationships between our faculty, staff, and students. To quote many a student, “The faculty know who I am and take the time to know what interests me.” Each day faculty explore with students their world and their place in it—no small feat these days. We will may continue to be challenged by budget cuts and efforts at reorganization, we will face them head on and with creative energy.

In a 1993 article in *Liberal Education*, a founding president of COPLAC called for the presidents to function more as “educational philosophers and less as organizational executives.” It is important as we engage in the daily battles to rise above the fray, to not lose sight or become out of touch with our mission, to offer fresh perspectives. As we look up, however, we must also keep our feet on the ground; we must pay attention not only to what is happening in the classroom, but to what is happening at the state house. This is an opportunity for us to walk the walk—if we are teaching our students how to operate in an increasingly complex society, how to think critically, how to adapt to a changing world, and how to go out and make a difference—then those core values should serve as *our* guide as we navigate the ever changing landscape within the public arena.

We will continue to wage a passionate battle to ensure that we provide access to a high quality liberal arts education to our next generation of leaders—and we need your help in making an effective case that a public liberal arts education is not a luxury, it is a necessity. A public liberal arts education is not a threat to the exceptional offerings and rich educational opportunities found within a private institution. We complement one another and, together, we can ensure that students—regardless of means—are prepared for success.

Notes

1. Alexander W. Astin, "How the Liberal Arts College Affects Students," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 98.
2. William F. Massy, *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education* (Bolton, MA: Anker, 2003) 306.
3. Ernest L. Boyer, "Considering College Quality," Greater Expectations National Panel, Briefing Paper no. 17, <[http://www.greaterexpectations.org/briefing\\_papers/bp17.html](http://www.greaterexpectations.org/briefing_papers/bp17.html)>.
4. Massy, *Honoring the Trust*, 26.

## The Importance of Institutional Culture

*Stephen R. Lewis*

In 1957 I took my first course in political science from Professor Robert Gaudino, one of Williams College's legendary master teachers.<sup>1</sup> In his course on comparative politics, we used the concept of "political culture," and as a budding economist I felt it was a squishy notion at best, and useless at worst. Forty-five years later I have a very different view: culture does not determine everything, but it is a very, very important aspect of why some institutions (colleges, corporations, or countries) succeed, and why others fail. So, I will focus my remarks on issues related to the culture of the institution, including how the culture is transmitted and might be transformed, why I believe it is so important, and what presidents, deans, trustees, and faculty leaders might do to promote cultures that serve the interests of our students.

While still in college I expressed some curiosity about college administration, and even ventured a question or two about college presidencies to my mentor and advisor. Mr. Gaudino affected shock and said, "But, Mr. Lewis, I thought you were interested in education!" In my 15 years as Carleton College's president I often thought of Mr. Gaudino as I suffered through countless hours each week that, at best, seemed only remotely related to the educational process.

When Frank Oakley was inaugurated at Williams in 1985, he commented that he would talk about the "eternal verities," since he felt that such remarks were expected at and appropriate to such

events. Over the years I came to believe that those verities needed to be repeated more than once in a presidency. For one thing, all the major constituents of the college—students, faculty, staff, trustees, parents, alumni, donors, the higher education community, and even the local neighbors—need constant reminders about the purposes and the values of the institution. Such reminders also are needed to ensure that there is congruence in how all those constituents view the institution, its needs, its priorities, and the behavior of those responsible for its day-to-day life—especially faculty, staff, and students. Everyone has to understand both the values of the college and how those values affect people’s behavior.

The American liberal arts college has a distinctive profile and, as we see from increasing evidence, a distinctive set of results on student learning and development. Within the universe of such colleges, of course, there are many variations in the particular niche each one serves. Part of the purpose in repeating the verities on a regular basis is to ensure that the special niche and purpose of the particular college is understood clearly, and that it forms the basis for action and for the behavior of its constituent parts.

The things we have in common as liberal arts colleges are often thought of as small size, residential setting, close relationships between faculty and students, and opportunities for learning outside of class. But as Oakley used to remind us frequently at Williams, if all we have is small class size, we face real competition from the larger universities, public and private, that might decide to focus more of their resources on honors colleges or some similar variant. One of the factors that is, or should be, unique to what we do as institutions should be the ability to create genuine and productive learning communities among students and faculty. Real exchange of ideas, challenge of viewpoints, thoughtful reflection on arguments that are contrary to one’s own, must take place on a regular basis. As was mentioned several times in yesterday’s session on teaching, scholarship, and professional life in a collegiate setting, there is a real hunger among faculty as well as students for such genuine intellectual exchange. We should ensure that such hunger is satisfied.

That we can do the job when larger places might not is illustrated by a story from graduate school. My colleague Gordon Winston was one of the first in our class to take a position for the following year: an appointment at Williams College. A senior economist of great international prominence said to me: “Winston going to Williams—I don’t understand it.” When I inquired why he was puzzled, he replied immediately: “No graduate students.” Since I had enjoyed the privilege of going to a small number of faculty seminars when I was a senior at Williams, I reported on the experience: faculty regularly circulated their work to colleagues, held seminars, gave their papers, defended their results, and responded to critical comments. My distinguished mentor paused, mused for a bit, and then remarked: “Hmph. Talk to your colleagues; never occurred to me.” I assure you this is a true story. I think it speaks directly to what we can do that the larger institutions cannot, or will not, do.

Take another example. A 2003 ACLS Occasional Paper by Sheila Biddle—*Internationalization: Rhetoric or Reality?*—provides a vivid indication of the difference between the university and the liberal arts college. She reviewed programs at five major universities (Columbia University, Duke University, and the Universities of Iowa, Washington, and Michigan) that involved aspects of “internationalizing” the institutions. In addition to sounding a theme similar to the one I emphasize here (“Recognition of the particular culture of the institution is essential to the success of the internationalization effort”),<sup>2</sup> she notes that the results of a study such as hers would be much different if she had looked at liberal arts colleges. At colleges, greater cohesiveness makes possible institutional commitments. Of equal or greater importance, “Since liberal arts colleges are concerned with undergraduate education, their chances of success in developing curriculum . . . are far greater than those of research universities.”<sup>3</sup> In her concluding chapter, Biddle notes that “with very few exceptions, there was a common lack of attention to undergraduate curriculum”<sup>4</sup> in the efforts at these five fine universities. They are research universities, and they behave like them.



Given the emphasis placed on undergraduate education in the rhetoric of those five institutions, I read Biddle's results as further evidence that it is not related to their reality. However, the real issue she raises for me is not the university versus college in terms of size, organization, or stated purpose, but the notion that it is the culture of the institution that ultimately determines the direction it takes and the choices it makes. The issue of culture is one to which I think we all need to give attention.

My first economics teacher, Bill Gates, was also my first department chair when I returned to teach at Williams (having wandered in the wilderness of Stanford, Pakistan, and Harvard for a few years).<sup>5</sup> Bill was a marvelous mentor to hundreds of students and dozens of faculty and administrators over his career at Williams. He was a model of what a department chair (and good collegiate citizen) should be and do. He regularly took each new member of the faculty aside to coach us—not just, or even primarily, on our teaching and on our scholarly or research agendas. He emphasized how the organization worked and why it worked the way it did. He emphasized our *mutual* commitments as faculty, and our responsibilities as citizens of the department and of the college, as well as of the larger profession. He insisted that, as a department, and as tenured colleagues within the department, we have regular discussions about our social contract with one another.

These discussions had to be held regularly because the department was complex. We ran a master's degree program, had a large research contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for many years, regularly provided faculty to the college for administrative jobs or major committee assignments that took considerable time, and had a leave program whereby each tenured member of the department was expected to go on leave for 18 months after having taught three years—and to find one's own funding.

Regular discussions and renegotiation of the social contract were also needed because Bill recognized early, and I realized much later, that faculty have very different stages in their lives. These stages,

both personal and professional, affect how we wish to spend our time. Sometimes one is on a roll in scholarship; at times one is consumed by curricular ideas and experimentation; older faculty often find fulfillment in mentoring younger colleagues; the opportunity to spend several years in an administrative position may appeal to some; family circumstances change and can influence when one wants to take a leave; intellectual interests change and one may want time to retool to develop a new area of scholarship or of teaching. The list goes on. And, of course, in addition to the changes within each of us, we were hiring new people and losing some to resignation or retirement; the mix of talents and interests would change even if one's own did not. Our regular conversations meant that we were attentive to one another's professional (and personal) needs and desires. We knew we had to arrange our own lives so that, over time, we could deliver on our responsibilities to our students and to the college as a whole.

Eighteen years of Bill Gates' mentorship as my teacher and colleague made an indelible impression on me and on my view of how department chairs, deans, and presidents should try to lead their faculty (and administrative) colleagues. At Carleton College I helped a number of younger department chairs work on the social contract among their (sometimes fractious) colleagues. The exercise was often productive, especially in bringing younger and older faculty into conversation about what each could meaningfully contribute. And, recent grants from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to Carleton, and a number of other liberal arts colleges, that focus directly on faculty life and career stages, have been enormously helpful in this regard.

I mention the discussions on the social contract because I think the notion of mutual responsibilities, explicitly understood, and discussed, and renegotiated (when needed) on a regular basis is critically important to developing and sustaining a culture that supports the core activities of the institution. George Kuh's results, reported earlier in this conference, make it clear that there is enormous variation among institutions superficially of the same type and size in the educational results for students. Institutions

that are successful, in my observations, are those that have strong, coherent cultures of expectations that are known and understood by all the constituents. They stick to the core: helping bright students learn and become independent in their learning, grow as individuals, and become responsible and thoughtful adults.

The centrifugal forces both in society at large and in our institutions are substantial: two-career families, the increased busyness of American society, pulls and tugs of the disciplines for the attention of faculty, intellectual schisms within and between academic disciplines, increased complexity of our institutions, and many more. With such forces pulling away from the core, it is of critical importance that those who lead liberal arts colleges emphasize the values and practices that are important to the purposes and the success of each one of them. And, it is equally important that the constituents “buy in” to those purposes. A good deal of the ordinary interactions providing the social and intellectual “glue” that faculty of my generation took for granted is simply gone. If it’s important to have that glue, and I believe it is, then we have to find new ways of providing it.

Let me list a few of the things that might contribute to building and sustaining a culture conducive to success of a liberal arts college.

- We need to provide clear and sensible orientation of new faculty as they are socialized into what it means to be a member of a liberal arts college faculty. (After interviewing exceptionally well-trained graduate students who were finishing their Ph.D.s at the top universities, my former colleague Henry Bruton used to ask: “Do you think if we hire them we could teach them any economics?”) What one learns in graduate school is not necessarily what one needs to help undergraduates learn.
- Faculty development programs (and resources) are needed in all three areas of activity in which most liberal arts colleges say they expect faculty to contribute: teaching, scholarship, and citizenship (or

colleagueship). And, since students, fields, institutions, and society as a whole keep changing, faculty development is *not* just for the young.

- Colleges should seize the “teachable moments” as part of their mission and purpose. The Iraq war, the 9/11 attacks, the Rodney King beating, and other dramatic events that stir our students are opportunities for genuine conversation and learning. Faculty and staff need to be encouraged to come out of their disciplinary caves and participate, modeling good public discussion of important issues. And, the faculty and staff who do participate need some recognition, both public and private, from the institution’s leaders for being part of the effort. These activities help build learning communities.
- Faculty (and students) have a hunger for broader intellectual exchange, but it is not encouraged by our busy schedules, fragmented lives, and disciplinary focus. When the dean offers to buy copies of a controversial or important new book for those who would like to discuss it over lunch or supper for a few weeks, my experience suggests that people jump at the chance, with collateral benefits to everyone.
- Conversations among faculty, both within departments and across the institution, about faculty life stages and how they affect the distribution of tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities among faculty over time can be powerful. These encourage continued discussion of the implicit or explicit social contract, and even of where the institution’s values lie. In my experience, such conversations can bring the “old grumps” and the “young Turks” into genuinely useful dialogue.

- All of the above can help provide greater congruence between what the on- and off-campus constituents believe about the college and its purposes, and about how well it delivers on its promises. Presidents have to be saying things to donors, and parents, and alumni that reflect what is actually happening on campus and in class.

In an interview near the end of my time at Carleton I was asked how I tried to judge whether or not I was being successful. I said the best indicator I had found was what I heard from parents, especially parents of graduating seniors. They had seen their children for the first 18 years, and then they had been able to observe the changes that took place while they were at college. In general we had a very happy group of campers among Carleton parents. It gave me a good deal of relief, as well as satisfaction, when I heard their stories in our back yard the afternoon before commencement each year.

One story in particular reflects the perspective parents bring. One year a mother sought me out and said: "President Lewis, I want to thank you and Carleton for all that you've done for my daughter. She's learned so much, she's grown and matured, she has become an independent person and she's developed such wide interests, and I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate it." I looked at the mother, and asked her "Are you sure we're talking about the same young woman? Your daughter was in my office frequently, *exquisitely* unhappy about her experience at Carleton, angry about racism, curriculum, student life, teaching and the general direction of the College." "Oh, I know," said her mother, "but she'll get over it. She just doesn't realize yet how much she has learned."

Maybe we had created the right culture in which she could thrive. And that's what we should be all about.

## Notes

1. Robert L. Gaudino taught political science at Williams College from the mid-1950s until his death at age 49 in 1974. A political philosopher trained at Chicago under Leo Strauss, he had a profound influence on Williams students who thrived (and more than occasionally suffered) in his classes taught in the Socratic method. He introduced a number of path-breaking programs related to experiential education, including Williams in India and his last venture, Williams at Home, both of which emphasized the need for reflection on experience, not simply experience itself. His book on Williams in India was titled *The Uncomfortable Learning* (Bombay, India: Popular Prakashan, 1974). His former students raised an endowment in his memory, and each year it supports a Gaudino Scholar from the faculty who provides unconventional educational opportunities for students.
2. Sheila Biddle, *Internationalization: Rhetoric or Reality*, ACLS Occasional Paper 56, (2003), <<http://www.acls.org/op56.pdf>>, 12.
3. Biddle, *Internationalization*, 3-4.
4. Biddle, *Internationalization*, 112.
5. William B. Gates, Jr. was a Williams College graduate who died in 1975 at the age of 58 after 25 years on the Williams faculty. He was a legendary teacher, especially of introductory economics, and a specialist in development economics. He was also an important faculty leader, a counselor to Williams presidents and other administrators, and a highly skilled craftsman at the art of college politics used for the highest purposes. He was a master at understanding the cultures of small organizations; how they could be developed, nurtured, or changed; and how they had to be respected if one was to be effective in working within an institution.

## The Future Ain't What It Used to Be

*Michele Tolela Myers*

On this beautiful and serene campus, among my friends and colleagues from the very best American liberal arts colleges, colleges whose collective leadership provides a distinctive vision of what higher education can be, I find it difficult to think that the future of liberal arts colleges will be less distinguished and more uncertain than their past. But as someone once quipped, “the future ain’t what it used to be.” The signs are troubling.

In 1999, *Daedalus*, the Journal of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, titled its winter issue *Distinctly American: The Residential Liberal Arts Colleges*. Some of you in the room contributed essays to that issue. It is a remarkable book about a remarkably distinctive American slice of higher education. Yet, Michael McPherson and Morton Schapiro, in their essay titled “The Future Economic Challenges for Liberal Arts Colleges,” already sounded the alarm. “Over the last twenty years,” they write, “America’s liberal arts colleges have endured a steady shrinkage of their traditional market. The number of high school graduates declined by 21 percent from 3.2 million in 1976 to 2.5 million in 1993, promoting a ferocious competition for applicants.”<sup>1</sup> They go on to describe marketing wars and promotional practices that have become the staple of most college recruiting offices. “It is not surprising,” they continue, “that during this period of dramatic change the number of schools that could by any plausible measure be called ‘liberal arts colleges’ dropped sharply . . . Fewer than 250,000 students out of more than

14 million experience education in a small residential college, without graduate students, where a substantial number of their colleagues major in liberal disciplines. If one made the definition of a 'liberal arts college' even more stringent [read more selective—my words], . . . the numbers would drop further—fewer than 100,000 students.”<sup>2</sup> They go on wondering “whether anybody should care if this dwindling segment of American postsecondary education were to shrink further.”<sup>3</sup>

They describe the struggle ahead for liberal arts colleges: “They face a public that is skeptical about rising college costs and pricing policies that are seen as unfairly ‘redistributive’; an education economy in which new information technologies are transforming how and why people need schooling; and a competitive environment that favors resource-wasting maneuvers for tactical advantage over strategic investments in quality.”<sup>4</sup>

The uncertainties we face as a sector are enormous. While Amherst, Williams, and other wealthy colleges are unlikely to ever be on the endangered species list, they too depend on the survival of a sector that must continue to be seen as a serious option by enough of the best and the brightest of high school students, a sector that must continue to play a meaningful role in defining excellence in American higher education.

But liberal arts colleges go increasingly against the cultural grain. In a culture that values growth and bigness, they are small, individually and collectively. Embedded in a mass culture, they deliberately focus on individuals. They are intimate and operate in real time in a culture where technology allows distance from the personal, where the virtual feels and looks just as real as real, and where the lines between reality and special effects are increasingly blurred. They offer an education that seeks to form habits of mind, foster critical thinking, hone leadership skills, reward creativity, emphasize the interconnections of knowledge, and prepare for lifelong outcomes in a society that insists on practical, immediate job training skills. They recruit generally from the best private and public high schools while a large majority of students come to



college under-prepared. They are hugely expensive when the gap between the wealthy and the poor is particularly pronounced, and inevitably appear elitist even to a society in denial about the profound effects of race and class.

And yet, here we are, self-consciously examining why we matter, and how many of us can continue to make a difference in this post-9/11 time, in a world where the threat posed by the cold war has been replaced by the insidious threat of terrorism writ large, where weapons of mass destruction are for sale, where huge ideological conflicts between democratic ideals and religious fanaticism of all stripes breed hatred and war, where influence peddling and self-interest trump the public good, and where integrity may be the theme of public speeches but not of public life.

So what are the challenges in our future?

*1. To be still more inclusive.*

The most selective liberal arts colleges, along with the best research universities, will continue to be a training ground for our elite. Their selectivity will guarantee their prestige, because the best students want to be where the best students are. If our costs continue to climb and our ability to provide financial aid to significant numbers of students doesn't, we run an increasing risk that the preparation for leadership our doors open will be restricted to the children of the most affluent and better-educated members of our society, children already being tracked since kindergarten. It is therefore imperative that we make even more extraordinary efforts to become more inclusive in our selection of students, in our awards of financial aid, and in opening our campuses to a population diverse in all possible ways. The leadership of the country must reflect the diversity of our society, or we will breed leaders out of touch with the people they serve. The 2003 affirmative action decision by the Supreme Court reaffirms what we have believed in and worked toward for decades, but we know how fragile the Supreme Court majority is on this issue, and we shouldn't take this victory for granted.

We are all more diverse now than we were 50 years ago, and we are led by a slightly more diverse group of presidents. But there is no question in my mind that we need to demand more of ourselves on that score. And it will not be enough to have members of under-represented groups on our campuses. As some of us who attended the Consortium for High Achieving Students meeting in Boston know, we must develop strategies to ensure that students do not underachieve and are not excluded from particular disciplines on the basis of factors having more to do with group stereotypes than actual ability.

*2. To teach democratic arts.*

In the post-9/11 era, more than ever, our colleges need to be a place where democratic arts can be practiced and civic engagement promoted. The surveys on college freshmen conducted annually by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA show a continuing decline in students' political and civic engagement. To develop a meaningful philosophy of life and to strengthen a just and civil society were among the top reasons the majority of students attended college some 20 years ago, reasons now replaced two-to-one by "being well off financially." There is a need for ongoing democratic and sustained dialogue on our campuses on the pressing issues of our times and their ethical and social implications, beyond typical panel discussions and lectures by "experts" followed by polite questions and answers. Conversations about values, social justice, socially and ethically responsible decision making, complex and clashing world cultures, must take place among people given equal voice at the table, regardless of their institutional status, and regardless of their beliefs. And these conversations must be sustained over time so thoughtful questioning and deliberation can take place. The skills of engagement needed for this type of discussion are basic to the exercise of democracy. Our students must learn to be inclusive, to engage one another, to listen, to question, to examine critically what they hear and what they say, to build consensus, to prepare for action if they are to become intelligent democratic participants and leaders who can cultivate a

deep desire to bring peace and justice at home and abroad. Our safety depends on it, the economy of the world depends on it. Our small and intimate scale makes it possible. We need to lead the way.

*3. We must resist the temptation to gradually erode the very factors that distinguish us from major research universities.*

- Competition for faculty drives us there. Competitive offers to outstanding faculty that include reduced teaching loads, research leaves, time for consulting, and appointment to fancy professorships, lead us to mimic the research driven university reward system and encourage our faculty to mimic the behavior of their university colleagues. Faculty want more time for research and grant getting on which their tenure depends, less time in the class room with teaching loads reflecting the demands of research, and the need for more frequent regular leaves. Faculty want less time for advising, less time for being on campus with students outside of class, less time for governance, less time to get to know one another outside their departments. It would be detrimental, I believe, if our faculty's central allegiance moved significantly to their professional discipline at the expense of the campus community. It is a trend we should fight.
- Knowledge explosion, increasing specialization in the graduate schools, and decreasing number of Ph.D.s educated at liberal arts colleges mean that our younger faculty may not always have the breadth (or the interest) necessary to teach more general courses or more interdisciplinary courses; and they prefer to teach more narrowly focused courses. There is obviously no way that a small college, no matter how wealthy, can offer its students the array of specialized courses available at larger institu-

tions. What we can offer, however, is the opportunity for work that cuts across disciplines, smaller group settings for learning, even one-on-one settings with faculty members who take their students seriously, impose rigorous standards, demand a great deal of critical reading and writing, and offer opportunities for discussion. We must resist the impulse to become mini-Ivies. The socialization of younger faculty members is of crucial importance. They must not be harangued. Rather, they must see senior faculty model the behaviors we want them to emulate, and they must be given some time to practice them—for example load reductions not for research but for learning to be a good teacher, advisor, and colleague and for developing interdisciplinary connections and courses.

- Faculty increasingly see a divide between the academic and the social lives of their students. They have little interest in involving themselves with issues of drugs and alcohol, and with the many emotional, health, and social problems of the young people they teach. Increasingly the province of the dean of students (by whatever name), these problems are seen in isolation, and our claim of dealing with the whole person sounds increasingly shallow. For example, we must find ways to engage students, faculty, and staff in the fight against the normalization of dangerous levels of alcohol and drugs as the necessary lubricant of social life.
- As documented in the Bowen and Levin book *Reclaiming the Game*,<sup>5</sup> athletics play an increasingly problematic role in our colleges, with up to 30 percent of admission slots reserved for “recruited” athletes whose academic performance is weaker

than other students', who under-perform and are more likely to end up in the bottom third of their class, who do less well than their own test scores and high school grades would predict, and whose influence on campus has widened the academic-athletic divide, undermining the education mission of the college. The ever-increasing need for highly specialized coaches to work with athletes who since childhood have been coached and played specialized positions on their teams, turns our Division III colleges into imitations of their Division I counterparts. We must resist diverting more and more resources to field winning teams and insure winning seasons, and we must make sure that our athletes are not in a class of their own, normatively different from the rest of our students.

I go back to a point made at an earlier session by Lucie Lapovsky: the students of tomorrow will come increasingly as first generation college students and from minority groups with less income. This raises at least two major questions with which I will conclude:

1. How will we serve these students and help prepare them from middle school on, if not earlier, to be ready to enter our colleges, thrive in them, and continue on to take their rightful place in society?

2. How will colleges that are not protected by significant endowments manage a higher and higher production function cost with less and less net-tuition revenue? Does the "winner-take-all" arms race in our sector mean that only the wealthiest colleges will survive? Will only 50 colleges survive as true liberal arts colleges, serving perhaps 75,000 students? And can a sector that small continue to have a meaningful role in American higher education?

**Notes**

1. Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, "The Future Economic Challenges for the Liberal Arts Colleges," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 47.
2. McPherson and Schapiro, "Future Economic Challenges," 47-49.
3. McPherson and Schapiro, "Future Economic Challenges," 50.
4. McPherson and Schapiro, "Future Economic Challenges," 48.
5. William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, *Reclaiming the Game* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003).

## A Story Untold and Questions Unasked

*David H. Porter*

The Skidmore College of which I became president in 1987 was still young and insecure, a college with a history of struggle and an alarmingly small endowment. As faculty and staff compared themselves with other selective liberal arts colleges, they everywhere saw institutions that were older, richer, more “prestigious,” and they ended up feeling inferior and discouraged. Under these circumstances I found it useful to stress the distinction between two gaps that were easily—but unwisely—conflated. On the one hand, there was the gap between what Skidmore was and what it could and should be—a gap that identified areas where we indeed fell short of our peers, usually because of paucity of funds, and where we clearly needed to do better. The other gap, equally important but quite different, was between what Skidmore already was—including areas where the college was in fact very strong, even uniquely strong—and how the “world out there” viewed us. About this second gap we had no reason to feel inferior or discouraged about our achievements: we simply needed to get the word out more effectively.

Small liberal arts colleges face two similar gaps today, and again it is important to keep the two distinct, and to deal with each in its own way. I begin with the “information gap.” We tend to think that the world understands what we are and what we do; in fact, I believe, this is not the case. In saying this I’m thinking less of the widespread misunderstandings about us—the myths that we are all

wealthy and expensive, for instance, or that we all cater primarily to the rich and elite—than I am of the public’s astonishing ignorance as to the essential features that do unite us, and that differentiate us from other institutions. Yes, many people recognize that we tend to be smaller than other institutions, but few understand the degree to which our concentrated focus on undergraduate education is not only extraordinary but even unique.<sup>1</sup> I expect that still fewer comprehend the ways in which our modes of teaching differ from those found elsewhere—our emphasis on process rather than on accumulation of information, our determined adherence to the Socratic method, our belief in the value of faculty and students together asking questions and together seeking answers.<sup>2</sup> And I doubt that there are very many at all who could articulate how these distinctive features of our institutions shape the sorts of impact we have on our students and graduates.

I must confess that not until I taught a term at Princeton in 1986 did I myself fully recognize just how distinctive are the small colleges I’d known all my life. What most palpably brought home the difference between Princeton and Carleton, where I had taught for 24 years, was something quite small in itself—the sounds that echoed up and down the corridor where we classics department faculty had our offices. What I heard at Princeton all day, every day, in office after office, was the whine and whirr of ink-jet printers, testimony to the scholarly energy of my colleagues, who were turning out books and articles at a rate both impressive and inspiring. In contrast, the sounds I was used to hearing in the halls at Carleton were those of students talking with each other, of undergraduates stopping at an office for a quick chat with a faculty member, of conversations continuing as a student left a more formal conference in one of those offices. In making this comparison, the last thing I have in mind is to criticize Princeton. My term there was in every respect a delight and a boon. I relished the opportunity to offer a graduate seminar on Horace, and I found the undergraduates in my advanced Aeschylus course receptive and stimulating. My two-course teaching load permitted me to pursue active research and writing during the semester, something I’d



never managed in all my years at Carleton, and participating in the scholarly give-and-take of a large and powerful classics department was a heady and exhilarating experience. Nor did the difference have anything to do with faculty attitudes toward teaching: my Princeton colleagues were splendid teachers who took their teaching and their students very seriously—just as many of my Carleton colleagues were deeply involved in research and could well have taught at research universities. It was simply that I felt in my bones as never before the profound differences in institutional mission: Princeton's central mission is to advance learning through cutting-edge research, Carleton's to offer a superb undergraduate education. Both institutions were fulfilling their missions admirably—but these missions were as different as the sounds they evoked.

If even I, who had spent most of my life in smaller colleges, still needed to have our distinctive character brought home in this way, is it surprising that most of the public scarcely understands us? Toward the close of my time at Carleton I encountered a dramatic instance of just how deep the misunderstanding can be. A student of mine had at the end of his sophomore year declared a classics major prior to heading home to Colorado for the summer, indicating as he did so that he knew his mother would be unhappy with his decision. When he finally mustered the courage to tell her this news in mid-July, “unhappy” scarcely describes her reaction. Within hours she had him in the car, heading for Minnesota to confront the man she held responsible for her son's misguided choice. I first learned what was happening when a sedan drew up to the curb outside my Northfield home as I mowed the lawn on a steamy July afternoon, dressed in grubby shorts and sweating profusely. A well-dressed woman leapt out of the driver's side and opened the passenger door for her son, who trailed her sheepishly across the lawn toward me. “Dr. Porter?” she said. When I indicated that she had the right man, she continued: “Why have you ruined my son's life? I thought he was going to make something of himself; now I hear he's going to major in Greek and Latin.”

I suggested that I get a shirt on and that we go inside for some iced tea, and during the next hour I explained to her that we had no

thought of turning her son into a classicist—that in fact we made a point of telling all our majors that positions in classics were few and far between at that time. To the contrary, a major in classics, like majors in other disciplines, represented an in-depth immersion in a significant field of intellectual inquiry—something Carleton considered integral to a broad and rigorous educational experience designed to prepare students for whatever they might choose to do after college. (I also intimated, I must confess, that our experience over the years suggested that a student who had really mastered the Greek verb could probably do anything!)

This conversation was, to be sure, an extreme instance, but I fear it is all too characteristic of the degree to which parents increasingly see education—including education at our small colleges—primarily in terms of its immediate relevance to the job market (a fixation that I find much less marked in the students themselves—as indeed with this student and his choice of a classics major). Still more significant, this parent's reaction was all too representative of how little the public understands what the Carletons of our country are all about. Here was someone who was proud that her son had chosen Carleton and been accepted there, who had through him been associated with the college for more than two years, and who was putting a lot of money and effort into giving her son an education at a fine small college. And yet she had no idea of what we did at Carleton, how we did it, and why—that a major in English or philosophy, in government or one of the sciences, in classics or art history, had as its goal not to turn students into professionals in those fields but to cultivate certain qualities of mind: the ability to think, write, and speak intelligently and clearly; the habit of asking and trying to answer hard questions; openness and fairness toward new ideas; intellectual curiosity; delight in the play of the mind. Quite obviously she had no inkling as to what Stephen Fix discussed earlier at this conference—why it is that our institutions so often emphasize study of the past, and why it is, accordingly, that a major focused on the language, literature, history, and culture of ancient Greece and Rome can in fact provide superb preparation for dealing with the present and the future. Still less did she understand

how Carleton's distinctive characteristics—our size, our focus on undergraduate education, the student-faculty dynamics of the typical class and classroom—were in fact directly related to what we hoped to accomplish for our graduates. In sum, she wasn't even close to comprehending the transformational impact a Carleton College can have on its students, and the reasons behind this impact.

And yet, evidence that this type of education does transform students' lives, does prepare them for the varied challenges of the "world out there," is abundant—indeed, we all have our stories to tell. I enjoy telling about the Carleton classics major who started her first job search by checking out an ad for a position in the technology sector. She had little hope of success, given her modest background in math and science, and she readily acknowledged this deficiency to her interviewer. "Then what did you study?" he asked. When she told him she had majored in classics, and had done advanced work in both Greek and Latin, he said, "Wow—you must be pretty smart to know Greek and Latin. I'll bet you could pick up quickly what you need to know here." Within an hour she had the job, and it proved the start of a successful career in this field. And then there was the Skidmore double major in biology and music who within a year of his graduation was flourishing in a Wall Street investment company, and the CEO of a blue-chip company who spent most of the time I had with him telling me how his English major at Wabash College had been a catalyst to so much of what he'd accomplished, and the . . . .

I could easily go on—as could any one of us: professors and presidents, disciplines and colleges—we all have such stories to tell, and we tell them pretty well. What we do not do well, however, is to tell our collective story—to pull together the common threads of how we teach and why at our type of institution, and to assemble the combined evidence from our schools in such a way as to explain authoritatively and persuasively the significant impact we have on our students—and through them on society at large. That such a collective story can be told—and that we can tell it—is apparent from the success of the Oberlin Science Group, which looked long

and hard at how our type of institution teaches science—or, better, does science—and at the impact that approach has not just on individual students but on the larger scientific community. By collecting and analyzing evidence from a large number of our schools, this group put together a collective story that was coherent, well documented, and powerfully persuasive, and that story had a considerable impact on those who heard it, whether they were in government, education, the foundation world, or the general public.<sup>3</sup>

An old saw suggests, “Education is what remains after you’ve forgotten the facts.” The definition is not profound, but it points to what our story needs to emphasize. For the truth, as all of us know, is that from education at small liberal arts colleges a great deal does remain after students have “forgotten the facts”—that the vast majority of them take from their college years personal and intellectual and moral qualities that underpin lives both successful and beneficial to society, and that disproportionate numbers end up in significant leadership positions. We can also demonstrate that the transformations that occur with such students owe much to the distinguishing characteristics I’ve mentioned before—our size, our undergraduate focus, the ways we teach. For our institutions collectively, however, and for this type of education as a critically important feature of the educational landscape—indeed, of our country’s landscape—this story remains largely untold. Material presented during this conference suggests that increasingly we have the wherewithal to tell it cogently and well;<sup>4</sup> unless we learn to do so, both society at large and we ourselves will be the losers.

The same slightly corny definition of education leads naturally into the second gap I want to discuss, one that focuses on an area where I think we are falling seriously short of what we could and should be. If indeed the most important thing for us to consider is our long-range impact on students—what remains after they have forgotten the facts, as surely they will do—then all of us, whether faculty, administrators, or trustees, should be paying a great deal more attention to the implications of this definition: What is it that we want our students to retain after they have left a given course, a

particular major, four years at our college? What do we hope will remain with them five years—or 25 years—hence? If these are our ultimate goals, how do we achieve them? How will we know if we are—or are not—succeeding? These should be the central questions, but I fear too few of us, whether individually or institutionally, give them the attention they deserve in our thinking and planning. If my first section dealt with a story too largely untold, this section is about questions too often unasked.

In fact, as we all know, what remains from a given educational experience often defies expectation and intuition. I think, for instance, of two courses I took during my first year at Swarthmore College. One, an introductory course in political science, was taught by a professor who clearly put considerable effort into preparation, established a congenial atmosphere for discussion, and was readily available outside of class. Time spent in the classroom was enjoyable, and I liked the professor personally—but a year after taking the course I realized that about all I retained from it was the recollection that one of our textbooks had been bright green, the other a rusty red.

The other course was an introduction to philosophy. It was taught by a professor who seemed to have a grudge against everything in sight, including the course itself and the students in it. By way of introducing us to philosophy, this professor led us one by one through the proofs of God that had been proposed from antiquity to the present, goading us with obvious relish to discover the logical fallacies of each. Classes felt disorganized; the teacher seemed antagonistic and was hard to find outside class; and the whole experience was not only unpleasant but at times emotionally scarring. And yet a year after I'd taken this course I realized one day that it had been among the most important experiences of my life—that it had obliged me to think about these important matters with a depth and passion and clarity I'd never before mustered, and that it had left me permanently changed, and changed for the better.

I can't say for certain, but my hunch is that in developing their courses, neither of these two faculty members paid a great deal of attention to what would remain a few years after we had taken their

classes. And yet the counterintuitive fact was that one class had been conscientiously prepared, with every effort made to interest us—but of that class almost nothing remained; while the other, which had seemed helter-skelter in organization and questionable in approach, had left a profound and permanent mark.

My own early experience with a mythology class at Carleton also brought me face to face with the issue of a course's long-term impact. This was a class new both to Carleton and to me, and on the advice of several colleagues I put it together the first year with a strong eye toward organization and rigor, trying to make sure that we surveyed the Greek myths thoroughly and that the students really learned them. The course went pretty much as planned: we covered the material in grisly detail, and most students demonstrated on quizzes and exams that they had mastered the myths reasonably well. As the term progressed, though, it became obvious that student enthusiasm was waning, and toward its end I found myself wondering what students would remember of all these myths after the course ended. My hunch, as I thought about it, began to be that they'd remember about as much as I had of that first political science course at Swarthmore.

One thing students clearly did remember was that that they should warn others away from this class: from 60 students the first year, enrollment plummeted to about 20 the second. Chastened and disappointed that despite all my efforts the first run-through had clearly been a fiasco, I began trying different gambits with this smaller group the second year, including mixing in a few modern versions of ancient myth. It was in the context of one such contemporary version that one day, almost by chance, I commented at the end of class that if any students were interested in creating their own reworkings of these ancient tales—a poem, a short story, a sketch, a painting or dance—I'd be happy to see their work. To my surprise, about half of the students took me up on this offer, often with ambitious and highly original efforts. The next year I inserted such a project as a required but ungraded assignment, and in succeeding years I experimented with additional ways of encouraging and obliging students to find their own approaches to

myth, to take myth in their own directions. From a close-ended, tightly controlled class in which the students learned the myths, “got them right,” the class turned into an often scarily open-ended adventure in which the focus seemed often on getting the myths wrong—on exploiting their capacity to move in strange and surprising directions, to take on lives of their own, to lead students and teacher alike into experiences that were unanticipated, intense, even troubling. I took as a sign of progress a postcard a student sent me one year during her bus trip home at the end of the term. She wrote that for most of the semester she’d found herself becoming ever more angry; that the course had seemed constantly to veer in new and unexpected directions; that any answers we came up with proved provisional at best and were soon controverted by subsequent information and findings. “I found it all terribly upsetting,” she wrote. “But then one day I suddenly saw what you were doing—that the whole point was that only I could find my answers, my own understanding of myth. And oh my, from then on how exciting it was!”

That the course had been so miserably unsuccessful the first time through—and that I myself had realized its long-term impact was likely to be minimal—made me acutely aware when it began to take a more positive turn. In particular, I could now sense that though these students too would probably forget most of the myths we’d studied, they would take from the course some more lasting understandings of myth and of themselves—as well, probably, as a distinct recollection of the overall experience. What I had gone through with this class, in turn, led me to pay more attention in other courses as well to what would remain after students had forgotten the specifics which had once so occupied our attention—in a word, to focus more on outcomes.

For that, of course, is what we’re talking about. “Outcomes assessment” is not a phrase I especially like, and I know that to most faculty at our institutions it is anathema: we value our independence in the classroom, we resist intrusions on disciplinary matters where we claim full authority, we resent what we see as the jargon-ridden projects of visiting accreditation committees. And yet, at its

heart “outcomes assessment” is something with which any faculty member is and should be intensely concerned: What will be the long-term impact of this course I’m giving? What will students remember from it? What will be left of it in their lives five, 10, 25 years hence? Aren’t these precisely the questions to which any good faculty member craves answers?

Moreover, I think that both as faculty and as institutions we fail to confront such questions at our peril, and our students’. Data presented at this conference is again very much to the point, for it demonstrates beyond a doubt that while many students experience positive outcomes at our colleges and in our programs, the variations within groupings of students at individual colleges are wide—too wide for us not to take them to heart.<sup>5</sup> I have myself witnessed such variations at the splendid schools where I have studied and taught. Participating in the honors program at Swarthmore was perhaps the most important educational experience of my life, one that has shaped everything I have subsequently done; and I know that for many others it has over the years had a similarly catalytic impact. At the same time, however, I know many other Swarthmore students—my late wife among them—for whom this program functioned very differently, in fact leaving them feeling not empowered but diminished and defeated, an educational outcome no one would seek. In the same way, I always felt that Carleton did a superb job with its students, and I know great numbers for whom their four years at this college was a transforming experience on which they have drawn throughout their lives. But during my year as interim president at Carleton I had an experience I cannot forget. At a gathering of alums in San Francisco a recent graduate, obviously a strong Carleton advocate—as well as a candid one—asked me, “What are you doing to assure that Carleton does not leave its students maimed?” That others in the audience were nodding their heads in agreement made the question the more searing in its implications.

Such instances suggest to me that we must find ways to assure that all of us regularly confront these questions about outcomes at every level—as we prepare for an individual class, as we map out a



course, as we plan a departmental major, as we think of what we want students to take from their four years at our college. I am, for instance, currently teaching an introductory Greek course at Williams. Of the 11 students in it, I know that a couple will not be able to take another course in classical Greek—this is it. Of the others, several may take a few more courses in the language, and one or two might even major in classics. That said, it remains likely that five or 10 years hence at most one or two of these 11 will still be doing Greek, and that the rest will inevitably have forgotten most of the complex materials—the manifold contortions of the Greek verb, for instance!—on which we are currently laboring so hard. It is accordingly incumbent on me—as well as both useful and stimulating—constantly to ask myself as I plan out this course, as I think about how to teach it and what to emphasize on a given day, what will remain when these students, most of them, have forgotten most of the details.

In the same way, those of us in classics departments at Williams and elsewhere should regularly be asking similar questions in candid recognition that the great majority of our majors will not go on in classics after they graduate. To put it differently, we should never forget the concerns that mother from Colorado was raising about her son's decision to major in this field. We all believe, as I tried to explain to her, that a classics major in fact represents an experience that will provide students a superb background for whatever they choose to do—long after they have forgotten most of the specifics they have mastered in our courses; but as we shape our majors, as we decide what courses to include in them, as we create the exercises that will serve as their capstones, do we really pay sufficient heed to what their long-term impact will be? Similarly, if those of us who design the programs and curricula of our colleges believe in the moral and civic ends that our institutions have always espoused—and which a number of papers at this conference eloquently reiterate; if we really want to produce graduates who will be good citizens and leaders; if our goal is to educate the whole person, not just the mind; if we truly seek to send out graduates willing and able to take strong and thoughtful stands on complex,

value-laden issues; then we must more persistently ask what we need to do to achieve these outcomes. Not to confront these questions is to abrogate our most central responsibility—and to sell both ourselves and our students short.

By none of this do I mean to suggest that we capitulate to the sorts of “outcomes assessment” we all deplore, the sorts which—as one conference participant described—encourage us to concentrate only on those outcomes that can be measured by numbers and computers. Rather, let us take the lead in developing (as several colleagues at this conference are already doing in promising ways) processes and mechanisms that will enable us to measure and understand the more intangible—and far more important—sorts of outcomes about which we care so deeply.

I conclude with a quotation from Antiphon, one of those fifth-century B.C.E. sophists about whom Christina Elliott Sorum spoke in her paper, a sophist who along with his colleagues contributed so much to what we now call liberal education, and even to the characteristic ways in which we teach at our small colleges.<sup>6</sup> As you will see, Antiphon’s words are all about outcomes:

The most important thing in the world, I think, is education. For whenever you begin any matter whatsoever in the right way, the end too is likely to turn out right: whatever sort of seed you plant in the earth, this is the sort of crop you should expect. And whenever you plant in a young body an education that is good, the end-product lives and blossoms through the whole of life, and neither rain nor drought can destroy it.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that we are growing wonderful trees at our institutions—and that we need very much to find better ways of telling the exciting story of what we are doing, and how we are doing it. At the same time, we need to think far more rigorously and regularly about just what sorts of trees we want to grow, and how we are going to help them flourish. There is an obvious link between these two

suggestions: the more clearly we can identify and understand the sorts of trees we want to grow, the more effectively will we be able to tell the world what together we are doing and why it is so important.

### Notes

1. This was one of the notes sounded by Frank Oakley in the eloquent address with which he opened the conference; see his paper in this volume.
2. On these points, see the comments of Stephen Fix in his paper in this volume.
3. When three of us, all presidents of Minnesota private colleges, paid a lobbying visit to a U.S. senator in 1987, we received dramatic confirmation as to the interest the Oberlin Group's collective story could excite. The senator in question listened to our opening pitch about science at colleges such as ours, then said, "This is a fascinating story!"—and canceled his appointments for the next hour so that he could learn more about it.
4. See especially the papers in this volume by George D. Kuh, Richard Ekman, and Mitchell J. Chang.
5. See again, for instance, the three papers mentioned in n. 4.
6. See Christina Elliott Sorum's paper in this volume. For additional comments on the ways in which the sophists' approach to education has influenced the specific ways we teach in small liberal arts colleges, see David H. Porter, "An Undergraduate Course on the Sophists and Aristophanes," *Classical World* 97 (2004): 79-87, esp. 86-87.
7. Gerard J. Pendrick, *Antiphon the Sophist: The Fragments* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002) 205.

## Liberal Arts Education at Large Research Universities and at Small Liberal Arts Colleges

*Morton Owen Schapiro*

I suppose that my comparative advantage as a member of this illustrious panel stems from my experiences as a faculty member and administrator at two very different types of educational institutions, Williams College and the University of Southern California (USC). They have little in common in terms of size, location, and focus, but liberal arts education is nonetheless an important part of each school's mission.

USC is not alone among large universities in taking the liberal arts seriously. We may reasonably lament the decreasing share of undergraduates enrolled at liberal arts colleges, but it is misleading to associate liberal arts education exclusively with those institutions. In fact, many more undergraduates study English, philosophy, history, art, political science, and geology at research and comprehensive universities than at liberal arts colleges. Many of us here today would argue that there are all too many business majors spending their undergraduate days engrossed in the study of accounting, management, and marketing, or education majors studying pedagogy and administration. But that doesn't mean that their educational experience is limited to preprofessional training. To the contrary, at most universities "general education" courses comprise a significant proportion of an undergraduate's classes.

What is it like trying to provide a high-quality liberal arts foundation at a university where more than half of the undergraduates

may major in one of its professional schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages relative to a liberal arts college?

I will begin my discussion of the disadvantages with a little overview of USC. While the number of professional schools at USC is large even for a research university, especially the number that offer undergraduate courses and majors, the case of USC gives an idea of the challenges and opportunities regarding liberal arts education. The College of Letters, Arts and Sciences is the liberal arts core of USC. With around 450 full-time faculty, more than 6,000 undergraduates majoring in College departments and around 1,000 graduate students, it is quite large and complex relative to a liberal arts college. In addition to the College, there are 17 professional schools at USC including schools of business, music, education, and architecture, to name just a few. Most offer their own undergraduate majors, which is why only about 40 percent of all USC undergraduates major in the College. It is also important to note that USC was a pioneer in what is usually called “revenue center management,” which is a version of Harvard’s famous “every tub on its own bottom.” Put simply, a unit gets to keep most of the dollars brought in through tuition, fund-raising, research overhead, and endowment earnings.

The challenge of providing a high-quality liberal arts foundation for students majoring in the College and elsewhere became immediately clear to me when I arrived at USC in 1991. During my first week on campus, I found two interesting advertisements aimed at undergraduates stuck under the windshield wipers of my car. One promoted “science without a lab” and the other “Shakespeare without books.” It turned out that the College and the professional schools were in a spirited battle for undergraduate tuition dollars, which, under revenue center management, stayed at the school where the enrollment took place. So the School of Gerontology was trying to attract students who were looking to fulfill their general education science requirement by trumpeting the fact that no labs were required, while the School of Theater was offering a way to fulfill a literature requirement by watching plays being performed on the stage.

This may seem outrageous on the surface, but the university's best scientists and humanists were by no means limited to departments based in the College. Ph.D.s in biology, chemistry, and physics populated the schools of gerontology, engineering, pharmacy, dentistry, medicine, etc., and it is natural that some of them would want to teach undergraduate core courses. Similarly, Ph.D.s in English could be found in the schools of theater, film, and communication while Ph.D.s in economics were in the business school and the law school as well as in the College's department of economics. The problem was not the lack of expertise of the faculty, it was that the competition for tuition dollars led to a dumbing down of the curriculum.

My guess is that one of the major challenges to providing at a university the kind of demanding liberal arts foundation for which liberal arts colleges are justifiably famous is that there is every incentive to care more about attracting customers than about maintaining high standards for the product. At USC, things got so bad that the provost, with the backing of the president, eventually declared that only the College could provide general education courses for USC undergraduates, whether the students majored in one of the College's departments or in a professional school. Not surprisingly, this led to a substantial reallocation of tuition revenues from the professional schools toward the College. As the former dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, I am not the person to comment on whether this financial change was good for the university, but I will not hesitate to assert that the quality of the undergraduate education in the liberal arts at USC was vastly improved. Not only did all of USC's undergraduates get much more of a common educational experience, without the threat that students would vote with their feet, courses within the general education core became more challenging and innovative. As an economist, I like free choice and believe that competition is generally a very good thing. But to ask 18-year-olds to choose between reading plays and watching them acted out is not something I would recommend. There are plenty of opportunities for

upper level electives, and in fact, the professional schools, having lost the “general education war,” refocused on providing interesting non-general education courses, often packaging them in exciting minors. What is the lesson here? It is clear to me that strong leadership at the university level is needed to keep the liberal arts core at the highest level.

A second challenge to providing quality liberal arts education at a university is that a good number of students simply don’t want to study “high school subjects.” At a liberal arts college, a faculty advisor doesn’t typically have to convince students of the benefits of studying history, astronomy, philosophy, anthropology, or classics. But I found it to be a much tougher sell for accounting majors or film majors or architecture majors. I can understand their position—many of them chose a large research university in order to focus on a particular discipline. Having a captive audience mixed in among students who are taking romantic poetry out of love and curiosity adds a dimension to teaching that, thankfully, is less common at a liberal arts college, though liberal arts colleges with strong science requirements are far from immune to this problem.

A third and last difficulty related to maintaining a stellar liberal arts curriculum at a large university is the simple fact that undergraduate education is but one of a number of areas of focus, rather than the predominant reason for existence. At USC’s College, with so many master’s and Ph.D. students, a research operation in the sciences that relied to an important degree on “soft money,” and a faculty with very high scholarly expectations, it would be unrealistic to expect the same degree of concentration on undergraduate teaching excellence that you typically find at liberal arts colleges.

But universities have some specific advantages, which I turn to now.

I think many would agree that it is much easier to make large-scale changes in the undergraduate curriculum at a research university than at a liberal arts college. Perhaps one reason is that since faculty at large universities are often less focused on undergraduate teaching, many of them are very happy when other folks deal with

the frequently aggravating issues of requirements, content, and pedagogy. It is more likely at a university than at a liberal arts college that the faculty will embrace the curricular recommendations of a small group of respected, hard-working colleagues (especially if, as was the case at USC, a number of the members of the group either went to premier liberal arts colleges or taught at them). When people joke that changing the curriculum is as easy as moving a graveyard, my guess is that they have the small liberal arts college in mind.

Another advantage that larger universities have over liberal arts colleges goes well beyond the provision of liberal arts courses—it is efficiency that comes with size. Michael McPherson and I discussed this at some length in an article we wrote a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> The bottom line is that it is very expensive to provide a quality education at a school with 2,000 students. There is every reason to believe that the number of students could be doubled or tripled without proportional increases in the number of faculty, classrooms, library books, or support staff. The inability to take advantage of economies of scale places small liberal arts colleges at an economic disadvantage relative to their larger counterparts.

But, in conclusion, I am always very proud to argue that the liberal arts college is well worth sustaining. While they may be inefficient in an individual economic sense, the benefits they provide the broader educational community are quite substantial. In short, liberal arts colleges set the gold standard for quality undergraduate education. While relatively few undergraduates may experience directly the joys of liberal learning at these colleges, many, many more profit from the fact that large universities attempt, now more than ever, to replicate that experience. In that way, the role that liberal arts colleges play in the provision of quality education in the liberal arts nationwide is far greater than that suggested by the number of students studying there. Should the liberal arts college become more marginalized within the scope of higher education in this country, the cost to the entire educational enterprise would be staggering.



**Note**

1. Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, "The Future Economic Challenges for the Liberal Arts Colleges," *Daedalus* 128.1 (1999): 47-75.



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*Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Higher Education* (with D. Witt, J. Jones, and K. Hakuta, 2003: Stanford University Press). This book was cited in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Grutter v. Bollinger*, one of two cases involving the use of race sensitive admissions practices at the University of Michigan. Chang received a National Academy of Education/Spencer Fellowship in 2001 and was awarded the Outstanding Outcomes Assessment Research Award, 1999-2000 by the American College Personnel Association. He served as the 2004-05 Fellow of The Sudikoff Family Institute for Education & New Media.

RICHARD EKMAN is President of the Council of Independent Colleges. He previously served as Vice President for Programs of Atlantic Philanthropies and, from 1991 to 1999, as Secretary of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. From 1982 until 1991, he was a member of the staff of the National Endowment for the Humanities, first as Director of the Division of Education Programs, subsequently as Director of the Division of Research Programs. He currently serves as a member of the Overseers Visiting Committee to the Harvard University Libraries, the National Advisory Committee of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, the Advisory Board of the Johns Hopkins University Press, the Council of Harvard University's Graduate School Alumni Association, and the Board of Visitors to the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)*. He has been active as a member of a variety of professional boards including the Board of Directors of the American Association for Higher Education, the Council of Villa I Tatti, and the Steering Committee of the Washington Higher Education Secretariat, among others. His previous experience includes service as Vice President and Dean of Hiram College, where he was also a tenured member of the history faculty. Earlier, he served as Assistant to the Provost at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and as Associate Director of the Department of Expository Writing at Harvard University. Ekman holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University in the history of American civilization, the institution from which he also received his A.M. and A.B. (magna cum laude) degrees. Ekman also has been awarded honorary degrees by Bethany, Georgetown, Hastings, and Ursinus Colleges.

STEPHEN FIX graduated from Boston College in 1974 and earned his Ph.D. in English from Cornell in 1980. He has taught since 1979 at Williams College, where he is now Robert G. Scott Professor of English. He teaches courses in 18th-century British literature, the history of

poetry and the history of the novel, and contemporary (mostly American) fiction. He has served at Williams as Dean of the College (1985-92), Chair of the English Department (1994-98, 2000-02), member of the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (1995-98, 2001-2004), and, since 2000, as Director of the Williams Tutorial Program. Fix's scholarship focuses on 18th-century British literature. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, and he has edited Johnson's *Life of Milton* for the forthcoming *Lives of the Poets* volumes. Since 1996, Fix has been a trustee of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Boston College.

MARY K. GRANT is the eleventh President of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. She came to MCLA from the University of Massachusetts where she served as the Chief Academic Officer and deputy C.E.O. of UMassOnline, a position within the Office of the President. Grant has served as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance and Human Resources at UMass Boston. She has also held the position of Director for the Center for Social Policy at the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs. Grant continues to hold the rank of Senior Fellow at the McCormack Institute where she taught and served as faculty chair for the Master of Science in Public Affairs Program. Her early career included positions with the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, and the Thompson Island Education Center. She holds a Ph.D. in social policy from The Heller School at Brandeis University, a master's degree in public affairs from the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts, and a B.A. in sociology from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Her research has addressed a variety of social policy and public funding issues. Grant has served on numerous boards and has worked with a wide range of community and educational organizations. A passionate advocate for public higher education, she was selected as the 2003 Woman of Achievement by the Organization for Massachusetts Business & Professional Women.

HELEN LEFKOWITZ HOROWITZ was born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana. After graduating from Wellesley College, she attended Harvard University where she received her Ph.D. in American Civilization. Her work in American history has explored cultural philanthropy, higher education, the American landscape, and sexuality. She has taught American studies and history and is currently the Sydenham Clark Parsons

Professor in History and American Studies at Smith College. She has recently received fellowships at the Radcliffe Institute and was the Mellon Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society. She is the author of the following books: *Culture and the City*, *Alma Mater*, *Campus Life*, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas*, and *Rereading Sex* (winner of the Merle Curti Prize of the Organization of American Historians, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in history, and finalist for the Francis Parkman Prize). Horowitz held an ACLS Fellowship in 2004-05.

ROGER T. KAUFMAN is Professor of Economics at Smith College. He graduated with highest honors in economics from Williams College in 1971, received his doctorate in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1978, and taught at Amherst College from 1977 until moving to Smith in 1983. Kaufman has taught macroeconomics, labor economics, mathematical economics, and health economics and was awarded Smith's Senior Faculty Teaching Award in 1998. He has written on unemployment in Western Europe, expectations and indexation in union wage agreements, minimum wages and wage flexibility in Great Britain, the effects of gain-sharing on productivity and wages, and several issues in forensic economics. His current research focuses on the economics of higher education, including optimal asset allocation for college endowments, sustainable takeout rates and spending rules for endowments, subsidies and recent financial changes among liberal arts colleges, and the paucity of incentives for truly excellent teaching. He has received a Fulbright Research Fellowship, a fellowship from the European Economic Community, an Austin Fellowship, and a grant from the Teagle Foundation. He is the coeditor of *The Economic Foundations of Injury and Death Damages*, and his articles have appeared in *The American Economic Review*, *Economic Journal*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *The Journal of Forensic Economics*, *The Review of Higher Education*, and *The Journal of Education Finance*.

GEORGE D. KUH is Chancellor's Professor of Higher Education at Indiana University at Bloomington. He directs the Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR), which is home to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice, and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire Research Program. A related initiative is the Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS) project, in which CPR is

collaborating with the Institute for Higher Education Policy and the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education on a five-year effort including about 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges. Kuh received the B.A. from Luther College, M.S. from St. Cloud State University, and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. At Indiana University since 1976, he has served as Chairperson of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the School of Education, and Associate Dean of the Faculties for the Bloomington campus. He has published widely and consulted with about 170 institutions and agencies of higher education. Past-president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), he serves on several higher education editorial boards including *Change* magazine. His contributions to the literature have been recognized by awards from ASHE, American College Personnel Association, Association for Institutional Research, Council of Independent Colleges, National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. In 2001 he received the prestigious Tracy Sonneborn Award for distinguished teaching and research from Indiana University at Bloomington.

LUCIE LAPOVSKY is Professor of Economics at Mercy College in New York where she served as President for five years (1999-2004). She previously served as Vice President for Finance at Goucher College, Special Assistant to the President of the University of Maryland at College Park, Director of Finance and Facilities for the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and as a Fiscal Planner for the Maryland State Department of Budget and Fiscal Planning. She received her B.A. degree from Goucher College and her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in economics from the University of Maryland at College Park. She is the editor of one book and the author of numerous chapters and articles. She has been a frequent speaker on topics ranging from women's leadership to budgeting and resource management in higher education. Her most recent work and speaker presentations have been on enrollment management and tuition discounting. Lapovsky serves on many boards and advisory committees including the boards of Western New England College, Packer Collegiate Institute, the Tuition Exchange Board, the Committee of Visitors of Goucher College, and the First Marblehead Advisory Committee. She has served as the Treasurer of the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, as chair of the Executive Board of

the American Council of Education/National Network of Women Leaders, and on the Supplemental Retirement Board for the State of Maryland.

STEPHEN R. LEWIS is President *emeritus* and Professor of Economics at Carleton College. Lewis holds a B.A. from Williams College and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Stanford University. He joined the faculty of Williams College in 1966 and was the Herbert H. Lehman Professor of Economics from 1976 to 1987. He served as Provost of the College (1968-1971 and 1973-77) and later chaired a Committee on Priorities and Resources for the 1980s (1979-80), a Financial Aid Task Force (1982-83), and the Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility (1984-86). During his 15 years at Carleton (1987-2002), the College substantially expanded its international programs, its international student body, the proportion of U.S. minority students, and its applicant pool for admissions; diversified its faculty and staff (in gender, nationality, and race); reformed its governance system; increased support for faculty development and student services; greatly expanded alumni financial and volunteer support; and more than tripled its net worth. A specialist in the economics of developing countries, Lewis worked in Pakistan (1963-65), Kenya (1971-73), and as Economic Consultant to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning in Botswana (1975-present, resident 1977-78 and 1980-82). In 1982 he was decorated with the Presidential Order of Meritorious Service by the Government of Botswana. He has written five books and several dozen articles on economic development. He has also taught at Stanford, Harvard, and the Universities of Nairobi and Sussex. He is a trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Minnesota Humanities Commission.

ROBERT A. MCCAUGHEY is Janet H. Robb Professor of Social Science and History at Barnard College, Columbia University. His recent administrative positions include Director of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching Technologies Grant and the Barnard Electronic Archive and Teaching Laboratory [BEATL], 1997-2005; Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, Barnard College, 1987-94; Chairman of History Department, Barnard College, 1983-87, 1995-98, and 2004-05. McCaughey's recent course offerings include "Early American Maritime History," "A Social History of Columbia University," and "Higher Learning in America." McCaughey received his A.B. from the University of Rochester in 1961, his M.A. from the University of North



Carolina in 1965, and his Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1970. His major publications are *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (Columbia UP, 2003); *Scholars & Teachers: The Faculties of Select Liberal Arts College and Their Place in American Higher Learning* (Barnard, 1995); *The American Nation* 7 ed. (along with John A. Garraty; Harper-Collins, 1987); *International Studies and Academic Enterprise: A Chapter in the Enclosure of American Learning* (Columbia UP, 1984), and *Josiah Quincy, 1772-1864: The Last Federalist* (Harvard UP, 1974). He has received the following professional recognitions: Gilder Lehrman Senior Research Scholar, New York Historical Society, 1998; NEH Summer College Faculty Fellowship, 1996; Emily Gregory Teaching Award, 1987; and John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, 1975.

MICHAEL S. MCPHERSON is the fifth President of the Spencer Foundation. Prior to joining the foundation in 2003, he served as President of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota for seven years. A nationally known economist whose expertise focuses on the interplay between education and economics, McPherson spent the 22 years prior to his Macalester presidency as Professor of Economics, Chairman of the Economics Department, and Dean of Faculty at Williams College. He holds a B.A. in mathematics, an MA in economics, and a Ph.D. in economics, all from the University of Chicago. Coauthor or editor of seven books, including *Keeping College Affordable* and *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy*, McPherson was founding coeditor of the journal *Economics and Philosophy*. He has served as a trustee of the College Board, the American Council on Education, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. McPherson has been a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

MICHELE TOLELA MYERS became the ninth President of Sarah Lawrence College in 1998 after a nine-year tenure as President of Denison University and three years as Dean of the undergraduate college at Bryn Mawr College. In 1996, Myers received the Knight Foundation Award for Presidential Leadership for radically changing the role of fraternities on the Denison campus and improving the academic programs and reputation of the college. Myers served as Chairman of the American Council on Education. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of ARTstor, JSTOR, and the Sherman Fairchild Foundation. She is a past Director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, past Chair of the Five Ohio Colleges Consortium, and past member of the President's Commission, National Collegiate Athletic Association. Myers earned a *diplôme* in political science and economics from the Institute of Political Studies at the University of Paris in 1962, an M.A. and Ph.D. in 1967 in communication studies from the University of Denver and an M.A. in 1977 in clinical psychology from Trinity University in Texas. Myers holds honorary doctorates from the University of Denver (1999), Denison University (1998), and Wittenberg University (1994). Myers has authored many journal articles in the field of interpersonal and organizational communication and has co-authored with Gail E. Myers four books on communication.

FRANCIS OAKLEY is the Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas, *emeritus*, at Williams College and President *emeritus* of the College. He is also President *emeritus* of the American Council of Learned Societies. Educated at Oxford, Toronto, and Yale, he is a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America (President of the Fellows, 1999-2002) and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Honorary Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He has written extensively on medieval and early-modern intellectual and religious history as well as on American higher education. His most recent books are *Politics and Eternity: Studies in the History of Medieval and Early-Modern Political Thought* (1999), *The Leadership Challenge of a College Presidency: Meaning, Occasion, and Voice* (2002), and *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300-1870* (2003)—the 1999 Berlin Lectures in the History of Ideas at Oxford University and winner in 2004 of the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference's Roland H. Bainton History Prize. His *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas*, the Merle Curti Lectures for 2001, is forthcoming in 2005 from Continuum. He currently serves as President of the Board of Trustees of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and as Chairman of the Board of the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle, North Carolina.

DAVID H. PORTER is Harry C. Payne Visiting Professor of Liberal Arts at Williams College. He received his B.A. from Swarthmore in 1958 and his Ph.D. in classics from Princeton in 1962. During that same period he studied piano with Edward Steuermann in Philadelphia and New York (1955-62), and in 1970 and 1977 he traveled to Amsterdam to

study harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt. Before coming to Williams in 1999, he held a dual appointment in classics and music at Carleton College (1962-87) and served as president of Carleton (1986-87) and Skidmore (1987-99). In 1994-95 he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar. He is the author of books on Horace and Greek tragedy and of two monographs on Virginia Woolf, and coeditor (with Gunther Schuller and Clara Steuermann) of a book on Edward Steuermann. He has written numerous articles on topics in classics (Horace, Homer, Greek tragedy), music (Beethoven, Satie, Ives), and modern literature (Cather, Woolf, Wharton) and contributed Op-Ed pieces to *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Current projects include articles on Aeschylus and James Fenimore Cooper and a book on Willa Cather. As a pianist he has given recitals at colleges and universities throughout the United States and in Great Britain. Works recently performed include Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano, and George Crumb's *Makrokosmos III*.

KENNETH P. RUSCIO is Dean of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond. Prior to his appointment at the University of Richmond in 2002, he was a member of the faculty at Washington and Lee University, where he served for 15 years as Professor of Politics and associate dean of the Williams School of Commerce, Economics and Politics. Ruscio received his B.A. from Washington and Lee University in 1976, and his M.P.A. and Ph.D. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University in 1979 and 1983, respectively. He currently serves as National President of Omicron Delta Kappa, the national leadership honor society, and is a trustee of their foundation. His writing has focused on leadership and normative issues in public policy. His recent book *The Leadership Dilemma in Modern Democracy* looks at leadership theory in modern democracies. Throughout his career, he has maintained a strong interest in liberal education and the future of liberal arts colleges. An early publication—*The Distinctive Scholarship of the Selective Liberal Arts Colleges*—made the case that liberal arts colleges encourage a distinctive approach to scholarship. He has also written on the culture of academic disciplines and on the challenges of interdisciplinary work. As Dean of the Jepson School, he works with an interdisciplinary group of faculty in a unique program that educates students for and about leadership. Drawing from the traditional liberal arts disciplines, the school offers an innovative set of courses in ethics, the

foundations of leadership, service to society, critical thinking, and various social science perspectives on leadership.

MORTON OWEN SCHAPIRO became Professor of Economics and the 16th President of Williams College on July 1, 2000. He previously served as a member of the Williams College faculty from 1980 to 1991 before going to the University of Southern California where he served as Chair of the Department of Economics until 1994 and then as Dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences until 2000. During his last two years as Dean, he also served as the University's Vice President for Planning. Schapiro is among the nation's premier authorities on the economics of higher education, with particular expertise in the area of college financing and affordability, and on trends in educational costs and student aid. He is widely quoted in the national media and is regularly asked to testify before U.S. Senate and House committees on economic and educational issues. He has written more than 50 articles and five books, including (with his long-term coauthor Michael S. McPherson) *The Student Aid Game: Meeting Need and Rewarding Talent in American Higher Education* (Princeton UP, 1998), *Paying the Piper: Productivity, Incentives and Financing in Higher Education* (also with Gordon C. Winston, U of Michigan P, 1993), and *Keeping College Affordable: Government and Educational Opportunity* (Brookings, 1991). Schapiro has received research grants and contracts from the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the World Bank, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the College Board, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, and other groups to study the economics of higher education and related topics.

CHRISTINA ELLIOTT SORUM (1944-2005), to whom this volume is dedicated, received her B.A. from Wellesley College (1967) and her Ph.D. from Brown University (1975). She initiated a classics program at North Carolina State University and then moved to Union College where she chaired the Department of Classics for ten years and was named the Frank Bailey Professor of Classics. She taught a wide variety of classes ranging from first year Greek and Latin to "Myth and the Cosmos," and received awards for excellence in teaching both at North Carolina State and at Union. In 1994 she became the Dean of Arts and Sciences, in 1999 the Acting Dean of Faculty, and in 2000 the Dean of Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Union. She participated in a variety of grant-funded projects to encourage collaboration

## Contributors

among colleges and the use of technology in higher education. Sorum published a number of articles on Greek tragedies and on the use of myth in ancient drama. She also published and participated in many panels on core curricula, the future of liberal arts colleges, and on the role of undergraduate research.

**PAULINE YU**, President of the American Council of Learned Societies, is a former Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Dean of Humanities in the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. She received her B.A. in History and Literature from Harvard University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Stanford University. She is the author or editor of five books and dozens of articles on classical Chinese poetry, literary theory, comparative poetics, and issues in the humanities and has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, ACLS, and NEH. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, she is on the Board of Trustees of the National Humanities Center, the Board of Overseers of Harvard University, the Board of the Teagle Foundation, the National Advisory Board of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and the Senate of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Yu is also an Adjunct Senior Research Scholar and Visiting Professor in East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University.