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Students are eager to explore the Big Questions of meaning and value. What they need from college is not answers, but vocabularies, metaphors, exempla, and modes of thought that can help them think the questions through for themselves.

The questions of liberal education are the student's own questions; more precisely, they are those of the student who is struggling to be himself or herself. How, then, could a liberal educator aid such students?

The role of the university is not to resolve the conflict between faith and reason but, rather, to study it and to let it enrich the curriculum.

The authors offer their views on how well colleges and universities are doing at helping today’s students engage the Big Questions of meaning and value.

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The U.S. Department of Education has launched a fundamental assault on the accreditation of higher education. At stake is the longstanding leadership of the academy in determining academic standards and judging academic quality.

The assault on accreditation began with the Secretary of Education's 2005–06 Commission on the Future of Higher Education and its unrelenting criticism of accreditation, especially as it relates to accountability. The commission's papers and its final report repeatedly spoke of accreditation's alleged failure to assure quality, to encourage innovation, to contribute to U.S. competitiveness, and to sustain adequate rigor in undergraduate education. The commission called for greater emphasis on student achievement, greater transparency, and evidence of quality that would allow for comparability across higher education institutions.

Targeting accreditation was a deliberate political choice made by the commission. Along with the funding of higher education, accreditation is among the few federal levers available to influence change on college or university campuses from Washington, DC. For institutions, accreditation by a federally-recognized accreditor is a requirement for eligibility for student grants and loans as well as other federal funds. For accreditors, sustaining federal recognition means they must be approved for operation by the government on a periodic basis.

The suggestions for federal action offered since the release of the commission report in September 2006, if enacted, would seriously erode the successful self-regulatory enterprise of the past hundred years. Institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and peer review—hallmarks of our enterprise—would be sacrificed in the name of accountability. The prized diversity of higher education would fall victim to a federal vision of accountability so rigid and bureaucratic that it leaves no room for the driving force of institutional mission that is essential to producing this diversity.

Many in higher education responded forcefully and articulately to the criticisms in the commission’s work. They pointed out that the higher education and accreditation communities have been and are effectively embracing and engaging current calls for accountability. They described successful accountability initiatives encouraged and nurtured by accreditation, significant work on accountability at many college campuses, and the many accountability-related efforts of higher education associations. They also noted that much more work remains to be done.

These responses had little impact, however; they did not stop the Department of Education’s orchestration of a number of subsequent events, each of which sustained the commission’s criticism and ratcheted up the pressure on accreditation. These events included regional hearings in which accreditation was a key topic (September–November 2006), a federal “Accreditation Forum” (November 2006), negotiated rulemaking on accreditation (February–March 2007) and a Secretary’s summit on higher education that addressed accreditation among a number of other topics (March 2007).

**Taking over the tasks of accreditation**

Even as these events took place, the architecture of the assault on accreditation was becoming clear. The federal government has begun a takeover of two tasks heretofore the province of the academy: government agencies would both define academic quality and take responsibility for judging it.
When it comes to defining quality, a single federal schema has not yet emerged. However, some preferences are clear. The indicators of quality that are mentioned most frequently include graduation rates, job placement, course completion, pass rates on licensure and certification examinations, and successful transfer or entry to graduate school. Quality is defined as tangible benefits gained from a collegiate experience.

With regard to judging quality, there appears to be a firmly-entrenched belief that external criteria, external validation, or a single set of external benchmarks must be applied to the indicators to make reliable judgments about quality. “External” means located outside of higher education or accreditation. There are also expectations that a single set of indicators judged by a single set of benchmarks can quickly lead to comparability among institutions of higher education—as urged by the commission.

Redefining important relationships

To enable the government to take primary responsibility for defining and judging quality, two important relationships would also need to be radically transformed: the relationship between institutions and accreditors, and the relationship between accreditors and the federal government. Government efforts are underway to restructure both.

The government would modify the institutional-accreditation relationship by replacing the considered judgment of faculty and academic administrators in our institutions with the judgment of accrediting organizations such that

• accreditors, not institutions, would set levels of performance for colleges and universities;
• accreditors, not institutions, would set standards for student achievement;
• accreditors, not institutions, would dictate indicators of student success.

The accreditation-government relationship would move away from the current mode whereby accrediting organizations partner with government and function as reliable authorities on academic quality. This partnership would be replaced by a superordinate/subordinate relationship in which the federal government plays the superordinate role of directing accreditation decisions about academic quality.

The Department of Education is seeking nothing less than a radical expansion of federal authority over accreditors. The national advisory committee charged to review accreditors would begin to function as a kind of Ministry of Quality. Accrediting organizations answerable to the committee would be told what standards they must use and what counts as quality. The committee's role would move from scrutinizing to ensure that accrediting organizations have the capacity to judge quality to using these accreditors to enforce standards of quality that the committee sets for itself.

The assault on accreditation is about replacing institutional judgment about quality with accreditor judgment—when the accreditor judgment is controlled by the federal government. The net impact of this assault is a transfer of authority and responsibility for higher education quality that is unprecedented in our history. While there is an appropriate federal interest in higher education effectiveness and accountability, this interest will not be well-served by governmental usurpation of the leadership role played by institutions and accreditors working together to define and judge quality.

JUDITH S. EATON is president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and a member of AAC&U’s National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP).
The essential learning outcomes of a liberal education are, as noted in the recent report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise, achieved through engagement with “the 'big questions,’ both contemporary and enduring.” Hence, the fourth Principle of Excellence identified in the LEAP report: “Engage the Big Questions.”

That phrase “both contemporary and enduring” conflates two somewhat distinct categories of questions. The first are questions derived from far-reaching social issues or problems—HIV/AIDS, for example, or poverty or global warming. They are “big” in the sense that they affect broad sectors of society or even whole populations, and accordingly, their answers are broadly consequential. By contrast, the enduring Big Questions are the fundamental questions of what it means to be human. They are questions of meaning, value, and purpose, and they endure because while the questions are universal, the answers are not.

The two categories do overlap, of course. Existential questions are posed within a particular historical moment, and responses to them are subject to contemporary influence. Similarly, individuals bring their own values to bear in both framing the contemporary questions and working with others to find answers to them.

Engagement with Big Questions of both kinds is a distinctive feature of a liberal education. As Robert Connor observes in this issue, “the texts, problems, and historical and aesthetic experiences that have long stood at the center of a liberal education speak directly to such questions and concerns.” It is expected that liberally educated graduates will participate in the search for answers to contemporary Big Questions, just as it is expected that they will continue to search for satisfying answers of their own to the enduring Big Questions. The moral duty to do both is captured by another familiar AAC&U phrase: personal and social responsibility, which describes an essential liberal education outcome.

Still, when examining the role of undergraduate education in preparing students to lead meaningful lives and to act as responsible citizens, it is useful to separate the contemporary from the enduring. To that end, this issue of Liberal Education examines engagement with the enduring Big Questions. Engagement with contemporary Big Questions—the theme of the 2007 annual meeting, “The Real Test: Liberal Education and Democracy’s Big Questions”—will be taken up in the summer issue.—DAVID TRITELLI
AAC&U President Serves on Department of Education Steering Committee

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings appointed AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider to a twenty-four-member steering committee that is providing input to the secretary as she sets priorities for action following the March 22 National Summit on Higher Education. In inviting Schneider to participate, Secretary Spellings noted AAC&U’s leadership on learning outcomes through the Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative and AAC&U’s earlier Greater Expectations initiative.

2007 Frederic W. Ness Book Award

James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield are the recipients of the 2007 Frederic W. Ness Book Award for Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money, an analysis of the growing influence of money on educational priorities. The Ness award is given annually for the book that best illuminates the goals and practices of a contemporary liberal education. James Engell is professor of English and comparative literature, and chair of the Department of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University. Anthony Dangerfield, a writer and actor, has taught at Cornell University, Dartmouth College, and Harvard University.

LEAP in Massachusetts

At an April meeting cosponsored by AAC&U and the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, business leaders and educators met to discuss connections between college learning and the needs of the global economy. On behalf of the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), council members Peter Karoff, president and founder of the Philanthropic Initiative, and Jack Wilson, president of the University of Massachusetts System, joined with Gary DiCamillo, chair of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable Education Task Force, to invite business leaders in the Boston area to discuss actions business leaders can take to build public and student commitment to the essential learning outcomes of a college education.

The meeting was designed to form the nucleus of a larger ongoing discussion across the state of Massachusetts about moving from the LEAP vision for higher education to successful innovation and educational reform.

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Watching Charlotte

Little Steps toward Big Questions

W. ROBERT CONNOR

Watching my one-year-old granddaughter, Charlotte, on the stairs—crawling, wobbling, trying to stand, constantly on the edge of disaster, determined—it is clear this is not play. It’s work, obligation, a necessity that is programmed, hardwired into her developing brain. The stairs are Everest: she climbs them not from choice or whim but “because they’re there.” Parents, grandparents, and babysitters can, temporarily, prevent the ever-imminent disaster of falling by distracting her, convincing her to try something else, offering a teddy bear, candy, or television. None of this will stop her for long, however.

One could, to be sure, design an environment for her where there is nothing to climb, but she would be miserable. Figuratively, she would climb the walls. At this stage of development, she has to climb. Without having read Aristotle on happiness, she knows she must realize her capacities if she is to be happy. And once stairs are mastered, it will be something else—talking, for instance.

Charlotte is, I believe, Everyman—and Everystudent. Fast-forward seventeen years. She is entering college now. She looks so grown up, and yet retains her youthful enthusiasm. She’s excited by everything around her—the college, her roommates, courses, parties, the social whirl. Now she’s talking all right! She spends amazing amounts of time chattering with her friends, worrying aloud about her late adolescent problems, trying to sound very sophisticated and sometimes succeeding. As we watch her, we wonder if there is something at work at this stage that is equivalent to whatever was driving her to climb those stairs not so many years ago. And if

W. ROBERT CONNOR is president of the Teagle Foundation, from whose initiative on the “Big Questions” this article emerged (see www.teaglefoundation.org). The author wishes to thank colleagues at the foundation and all those who have participated in the planning and implementation of this initiative.
Climb
so, what does she need in order to develop her capacity as well as possible? In other words, is there a developmental process at this stage that is as powerful as what we see in infancy? It looks very much as if there is.

Neuroscientists tell us that the human brain doesn’t stop developing at some early age, contenting itself thereafter with gaining information and refining existing skills. Rather, it continues to develop through adolescence, into young adulthood, perhaps even well into later life. So, although Charlotte and her adolescent friends may look like adults, “cognitively, they are not really there yet,” as Bea Luna (Powell 2006, 866) reminds us.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) suggests, moreover, that the experience of college might have a very powerful role in the development of the brain. Abigail Baird of Vassar College recently published the results of a tantalizing experiment. Using MRI scans to trace changes in the brains of first-year college students, she and her graduate student Craig Bennett found subtle but significant additions: five brain regions gained white matter, including frontal areas that prepare for action and form strategies, and other areas that interpret sensory input, emotions, body state and context. A control group of post-docs showed no such changes. “It’s the stuff that allows you to put yourself in another’s shoes and have empathy in the broad sense,” explained Baird. (Powell 2006, 866)

Neuroscientists warn us not to rush to educational conclusions based on this exciting but very preliminary work. Fair enough. But the evidence that during the traditional college years the brain is gaining new capacities, and that such capacities need to be nurtured and stretched, will come as no surprise to those who have kept a close eye on how people in their late teens and early twenties think and react. That’s the age group with which Socrates found he could make the most headway.

Educational psychologists have insisted that there is a central developmental task at this period: making enough sense of the world to find one’s way in it (see, for example, Parks 2000).

**The Big Questions**

We might predict that, when she reaches college, Charlotte will be ready, even eager, to explore ground that a few years earlier might have seemed weird or uninteresting to her. She may not have given up her old interests—and may be enjoying the state-of-the-art rock climbing wall her college recently installed—but they are now more likely to include a set of Big Questions such as, can I figure out how to lead a meaningful and satisfying life?

Given the fact that America is a country where religion holds exceptional sway, she may formulate those questions in religious terms: What is God’s will for me? Is He calling me to a specific vocation? What happens if one fails to live up to His commandments? If she thinks in these terms, she’s not alone. A broad-based survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California–Los Angeles (Astin et al. 2005) found a high level of spirituality among undergraduates: 77 percent of respondents said they pray, 71 percent said they consider religion personally helpful, and 73 percent said religious or spiritual beliefs had helped develop their identities. But a relatively small proportion of students who participated in the survey indicated satisfaction with how their college experience provided “opportunities for religious/spiritual development.” Sixty-two percent said their professors never encourage discussion of spiritual or religious issues.

Some of these students—Christian evangelicals are perhaps the most noteworthy, but not the only, examples—may be deeply committed to and well informed about a particular religious tradition. More often, however, undergraduates are what Christian Smith (2005) calls “moralistic, therapeutic deists”: they affirm that religion in general is a “good thing” because it helps people lead better lives. They may not be deeply grounded in a religious tradition, nor ever have struggled with the complexities of faith, let alone the problem of evil. In fact, some students may use religious formulations of their concerns and questions simply because they lack an alternative vocabulary. And, of course, right next to them may be sitting a student for whom religious formulations and experience are of no interest whatsoever.

Charlotte’s instructors may, understandably, look a little puzzled from time to time as they confront the difficult pedagogical questions that arise in such a setting. Some may attempt to design classroom equivalents of the perfectly flat environment that would have kept
the infant Charlotte from falling and hurting herself. That is an understandable and fairly common response, but its consequences are deeply troubling. Although I don’t often agree with his political views, I believe David Brooks (2002) when he reports that in traveling to American campuses and talking with students he “met students who had never really thought about how they wanted to spend their lives.” But Charlotte and her classmates won’t flourish in an antiseptic setting. Their Big Questions need to be brought to the surface, opened up for informed discussion. Once again, she and her contemporaries need to be challenged, guided, and helped with the developmental task of this stage of life. Charlotte needs a college that will help her understand her Big Questions and herself.

There’s an opportunity here for liberal education, if the Big Questions are well formulated and approached at a high intellectual level. The texts, problems, and historical and aesthetic experiences that have long stood at the center of a liberal education speak directly to such questions and concerns. Unless they are muffled or drowned out, they have important things to say to anyone who wants to lead an examined life.

“But I don’t want to brainwash my students!” This is a common objection to engaging students in this way. Let’s think about that from Charlotte’s point of view before we ask whether such an objection is professionally valid. She’s ready now to think hard about the Big Questions of meaning and value. But it’s not easy for her when she tries to think about how she is going to lead this examined life. She may feel all alone—a very terrifying feeling for a young person. She may not know that her friends and contemporaries are also concerned about those questions. Young people have plenty of ways to talk about style, money, clothes, music, cars, and prestige, but they often lack good ways of talking about issues of meaning and value. And Charlotte, like almost all of her contemporaries, suffers from a debilitating amnesia.

She has forgotten, or never has known, that others—some from long ago, some alive today—have thought about the same questions,
struggled with them, developed ways of thinking, vocabularies, metaphors, images, logics, exempla from real life and from fiction. She’s not alone; standing nearby are texts and works of art waiting to be put to work. Some are from the remote past—works by canonical authors such as Homer, Plato, Dante, and Shakespeare. But there are many others too—texts Eastern and Western, big and little, canonical and non-canonical, literary and subliterary, sacred and secular. And there is also logic and dialectic, as well as vicarious experience accessible through history, the visual arts, and music—all of which can inform her thinking and move her most inward being.

Yet despite her high SAT scores, the good high school she went to, her wonderful grade point average, and the great essay she wrote on her admission application, Charlotte is still a teenager, albeit a well-mannered one. She thinks of the great writers and artists of the past as her elders and feels that she has never been properly introduced to them. She’s a little shy, and while she’s easy and relaxed with her friends, she’s reluctant to just walk up to such distinguished people and say, “help me learn.” Charlotte is waiting to be introduced. And if she is not properly introduced, well, she just goes her way and forgets about them. And as she walks away, her instructor, fretting about “brainwashing,” assiduously avoids calling her back and introducing her to those who could help her most.

Of course, young people are impressionable; they can be easily misled; one mustn’t impose one’s own beliefs upon them. But there’s a fallacy lurking in such talk, waiting to trip us up and inviting us to cop out. Charlotte doesn’t need answers to her Big Questions—even if she asks for them, even if we believe in one set of answers very intensely ourselves. She has to answer those questions herself. She needs not answers, but vocabularies, metaphors, exempla, and modes of thought that can help her think them through for herself.

So now, in temporary remission from her amnesia, she walks into the class we are co-teaching, you and I, and meets some of those “others,” the ones you value most and the ones I do. She hears us argue about their thought and its implications. As her confidence grows, she joins in the argument. She searches for her own voice and for the texts and documents that are most meaningful to her, perhaps finding some that you and I have overlooked. She speaks and writes with passion, stumbling from time to time, but gradually gaining confidence, depth, and clarity. We can watch her develop her ability to deal in thoughtful, nuanced ways with questions to which there is no single right or wrong answer. You and I may rediscover lost sources of professional satisfaction as we watch her develop her capacity for “post-formal” reasoning. Perhaps, if we are courageous and ingenious enough, we will find ways of assessing our efforts more systematically and then use what we learn to improve our course next time around.

That’s a nice fairy tale, isn’t it? But let us treat it as a thought experiment: what keeps it from being true? Part of the answer may be, I suspect, the discourse of expertise. Those of us who have taught in colleges and universities have been trained to become experts in a specialized field. We receive scholarly recognition for our expertise and maybe even financial rewards. Above all, we derive great personal satisfaction from mastering a challenging body of knowledge. But the prevailing discourse of expertise in our specialty may not coincide with that which lets us talk well about core questions of meaning and value. The Big Questions, moreover, are intimidating; they seem to press us to move beyond our professional expertise and force on us an unfamiliar discourse. In this area, we are not confident about our mastery. Why can’t we leave these questions to some other set of experts—the moral philosophers maybe, or the clergy, or the writers of pop-psych books? Let me teach what I know.

Such reasoning is a powerful impediment to helping students deal with their Big Questions. It is also evasive, for it avoids posing a big question of its own: what are the limits of expertise? One of those limits is already evident; what we have been calling the “Big Questions” are usually not ones to which there are clear-cut right or wrong answers.

The discourse of expertise must not be allowed to drown out other conversations.
The old Tom Lehrer tune had it right: “Once the rockets go up, who cares where they come down? / That’s not my department, says Werner von Braun.” Moreover, while I can only speculate about the place of Big Questions in other disciplines, as a classicist and humanist I believe I can often see that professional expertise, uninformed by the Big Questions, has a terrible tendency to turn into trivia. Once expertise becomes the be-all and end-all, pedantry and obscurantism are just around the corner. By contrast, the Big Questions often illuminate the material we study, opening up fresh approaches and raising issues that enrich scholarship. After all, the authors we classicists study and teach were, by and large, writers who themselves struggled with the biggest of questions. Then and now, they provide not answers but challenge and insight.

Responding to students’ concerns about Big Questions
All this says to me that we should not shy away from admitting the Big Questions into our classrooms. The classroom may not, however, always be the best venue for exploring them; certainly, it’s not the only one. Service learning, internships, overseas study, and extracurricular activities can all play a role—mainly by raising questions that need to be explored with the perspectives, vocabularies, and insights derived from subjects represented in the curriculum. What goes on outside of class must not be treated as unrelated to the subject matter being studied in a college or university. A good example of linking the two together comes from Paul Christesen of Dartmouth College. When some of his students told him “they felt the need to discuss some things that were really important…[but] couldn’t find the right setting,” he devised an evening extracurricular seminar for discussing texts, ideas, and experiences. Christesen provides a brief text and a set of questions for the dozen or so students in the group to read and think about before they meet. The authors range from Sophocles to contemporary novelists and short story writers. Then, as he describes it,

Each meeting starts with a student doing what we call “discourse on your life.” The student, who prepares in advance, provides a brief autobiography and then speaks at some length (typically for 15–20 minutes) about a question about themselves they are currently trying to answer or a particularly important time in their life. The other members of the group can respond only in the form of questions. After the discourse is done, the group talks about the text and questions chosen for that evening. As moderator, my goal is to say as little as possible while keeping discussion focused. I always tell the students at the beginning of the semester that the ideal meeting is one in which I say absolutely nothing, and they run their own discussion and ask each other questions. Christesen’s questions often illuminate both the text and the students’ understanding of
themselves. One of Christensen’s questions will show what I mean: “[In this Canto] Virgil advises Dante to ‘let your pleasure be your guide.’ Can you imagine trusting yourself enough to put this advice into practice?”

I am not suggesting that every member of a college or university should go and do likewise. But Christensen’s seminar may help us think in fresh ways about the dichotomy that students so often express as the divide between “academics” and “life.” They are likely to continue to think in those terms until they are helped to see that there are other richer, more revealing ways to think about both “academics” and “life.”

To do that takes a special kind of commitment. It’s fine to have a few individuals trying things on their own, but on most campuses a structural problem keeps such efforts small in scale and sporadic. As soon as one steps away from formal course offerings, no one is in charge. It’s literally “not my department.” That problem can be an opportunity for chaplains, student life professionals, and others who work with students outside of class. If they take the lead, they can find patterns that work on their campuses and, thereby, bridge the gap that too often separates them from the faculty.

To be sure, this may require that the faculty first develop a more robust dialogue among themselves about Big Questions and how to approach them. As the Teagle Foundation explored ways to invigorate the study of such questions, we found that some institutions had developed ingenious ways of approaching them. For example, at one university, the funds for an unfilled position were used to create a faculty seminar on such questions. The same can be done with outside support. With Teagle Foundation help, for example, the University of Richmond is currently hosting such a discussion with participating faculty from several Virginia colleges. The success of such projects makes me think that colleagues on a campus often underestimate one another. Just as students

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**The Teagle Foundation Big Questions Working Groups**

In May 2006, the Teagle Foundation funded seven multi-institutional working group projects to investigate the connection between students’ interest in Big Questions of meaning and value and their engagement with liberal education. Formulated around sets of questions grounded sometimes in religious and sometimes in secular terms, and approached through faculty development, curricular, or cocurricular means, these projects all point to the possibility that more extensive and intellectually robust ways of grappling with such Big Questions can have powerful and invigorating effects on undergraduate student learning. (More detailed descriptions of the projects can be found online at www.teaglefoundation.org.)

**Faculty members may not recognize that their colleagues also have an interest in Big Questions and a willingness to break fresh ground in exploring them**

**Engaging Meaning through Mentorship: Strengthening Post-Secondary Liberal Education through Vocation-Based Mentoring of Future Faculty**

How can faculty—charged with the development of future faculty—best mentor toward vocation?
Graduate Theological Union, American Baptist Seminary of the West, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Franciscan School of Theology, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Pacific School of Religion, San Francisco Theological Seminary, Starr King School for the Ministry, University of California at Berkeley

**The Liberal Arts as Preparation for a Life of Work**

How should liberal education respond to shifting expectations about the nature of work, and what role should an undergraduate education play in preparing students for their eventual careers?
Hampshire College, Berea College, Cornell College, Smith College, Warren Wilson College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

**Contemporary Challenges to the Concept of the Human**

How do advances in genomics, neuroscience, computer science, nanotechnology, and other scientific and technological fields challenge our understanding of the concept of the human?
National Humanities Center
sometimes fail to realize that they share a concern about the Big Questions, faculty members may not recognize that their colleagues also have an interest in Big Questions and a willingness to break fresh ground in exploring them.

It is also easy to underestimate the range of intellectual interests of chaplains and student life professionals. One of the most interesting responses to the Teagle Foundation’s Big Questions initiative, for example, came from the dean of religious life at Vassar College, Samuel Speers, who is leading a working group to explore the origins and implications of the concept of “secularity” itself and its implications for contemporary liberal education. The group is trying to bring to bear on the mission of the liberal arts an important scholarly debate about whether societies become less religious as they modernize, thereby illuminating how the secular ethos in various settings can shape the ways students and faculty engage questions of meaning and purpose in the classroom and beyond.

There are, in short, many productive ways to respond to students’ concerns about Big Questions. The one thing that is not productive is to turn one’s back and pretend that these questions are insignificant or unworthy of serious academic attention. That is, of course, itself an answer of sorts, albeit a contemptuous one. It sends a strong, implicit message that leading an examined life doesn’t really matter. That’s not good enough for a liberal education. Charlotte deserves better.

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When faculty ask their students—and themselves—to put aside moral or religious viewpoints in discussions of “Big Questions,” do professors who claim a liberal stance in fact practice a restrictive pedagogy?
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Deliberation about Things that Matter
Focused on the process of deliberation, ten Phi Beta Kappa chapters and associations will explore a range of substantive “Big Questions” such as the essential nature of the human, the divine, the good life and the good human being, justice, or beauty and sublimity.
The Phi Beta Kappa Society

What Can I Do to Right the Wrongs of the World?
How can human rights education—drawing from theological, philosophical, political, cultural, sociological, and rhetorical perspectives—advance answers to the “Big Questions” of “What can I do to right the wrongs of the world?”
The University of Chicago, Macalester College, Midwest Faculty Seminar

On Secularity and Liberal Education
While secularity can promote tolerance and critical thought, and create democratic institutions and civic engagement, can uncritical secular assumptions strip—in various ways—students and faculty of fundamental aspects of their identity? Is secularity truly “neutral”?
Vassar College, Bucknell University, Macalester College, Williams College
RENE V. ARCILLA

The Questions of
There is a certain kind of liberal educator—I count myself as one—who bases his or her practice on a particular attitude toward the “Big Questions.” The questions of fundamental literacy in K–12 education, or of expertise in vocational and professional education, may be just as important, but we see them as quite different in kind. Indeed, the questions of liberal education take hold of people only under certain conditions. They call for distinct curricular and pedagogical approaches suited to a particular kind of learner. Beyond the scene of learning, these questions also challenge societies more generally to recognize the value of acknowledging, experiencing, and responding to them and to maintain forums for their discussion.

Now I admit that this understanding of liberal education can sound pompous and old hat. For the last few decades, our societies have been challenging liberal educators in turn to explain why and how their practices remain pertinent to a swiftly changing, endlessly modernizing world. Many such educators have themselves joined the ranks of the doubting and contributed to sharpening and disseminating this criticism. Leaving aside the strains these changes have also put on K–12 and vocational and professional educations, could alteration in the social conditions of liberal education be presaging the latter’s extinction? In our age of ever more sophisticated versions of critical, ideology-unmasking theory and ever more sensitive scruples about diversity—not to mention competing, popular, and innovative media—the Big Questions can seem like inert, sacred cows. If we are to take them seriously today, we need at the very least to dispel their lofty vagueness and suspect majesty and to elucidate the specific nature of their appeal. What distinguishes these questions from others? To whom are they appropriately addressed? How could liberal educators help such people respond adequately?

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To take up these meta-questions, I propose to move away initially from the handy but rather uninformative metaphor of size. Who can really measure whether a question is large enough to count? Instead, I shall try to re-describe the nature of the questions of liberal education via a close reading of some words of Rainer Maria Rilke. It is my hope that a clearer appreciation of the existential nature of the questions will illuminate what should be distinctive about this education.

**Living the questions**

The passage comes from Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*. These letters are addressed to Franz Xaver Kappus, a nineteen-year-old would-be writer who had struck up a correspondence with the poet. Rilke was himself only twenty-seven and striving toward a breakthrough in his own work. He was also struggling with marital difficulties that perhaps increased his receptivity to the inner torment and ambivalence that Kappus must have expressed. This is how Rilke replies.

You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even knowing it, live your way into the answer. (1986, 34–35)

A stirring appeal, but one containing a number of riddles. What does it mean exactly to be “before all beginning”? How are we supposed to “love the questions themselves”? How could one not “live everything” and what is demanded by the exhortation to “live the questions now”? Could such a life truly lead to “the answer”? Finally, there is the issue of principal interest to us: namely, what questions is Rilke talking about and are they the same as those that should concern liberal educators? Let me start to speak to these interpretive issues by turning to Rilke’s intriguing characterization of his addressee.

In his introduction to the collection of letters, Kappus avows that the focus should stay fully on the Great Writer and leaves out his side of the correspondence as well as any of his life’s details.¹ This reticence invites us to consider the condition of the person the passage is addressing in general terms. Rilke recognizes this condition as one prior to “all” commencement; he links it to a state in which one is struggling to resolve certain matters one cares deeply about that take the form of questions. The reason the questions are unresolved is because one still has not begun, not even started to exist. How could this make sense? I am reminded of the Cartesian principle, foundational for modern philosophy, that my existence is grounded on my awareness that I am thinking. Perhaps Rilke is suggesting that Kappus does not fully exist because the latter is not yet thinking for himself. Thoughts may be passing through his mind, but what remains in suspense is whether those thoughts are authentically his own. For Descartes, the experimental and methodical nature of the doubt that leads to the *cogito* never really includes uncertainty about who is doing the doubting, thinking, and existing. Rilke, in contrast, concerns himself with radical doubt in its wild state, where it surprises and consumes one without being willed or controlled. For his addressee—that is, anyone in the same condition as Kappus—the questions that have invaded him or her are not ones he or she has necessarily authored or thought. They disrupt active, creative thinking and render existence itself insecure.

¹ No wonder Kappus is desperate. But Rilke counsels “patience.” Instead of affirming Kappus and guiding him on his quest to settle his heart, he advocates loving the state of irresolution itself. Why ought Kappus not to look for answers? Because he is in no position to accept them since he is unable to “live” them. How should he “love the questions” if not by devoting himself to answering them? He should regard them as “locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.” The call for patience is thus supported by two strands of converse argument. On the one hand, Rilke claims that an impatient search for answers would be unproductive because answers can only be given to one when one is ready to live them, and someone who has not yet begun to think his or her own thoughts is incapable of doing this. On the other hand, what is possible and good for someone so before all beginning is rather to revere the questions
that occur to him or her as such, accepting their hidden dimension indifferent to any seeker’s interest.

Notice how the first, negative argument against the search for answers puts stress on a desire that these be supplied by another. This desire grows presumably out of a natural disposition to believe that what one lacks must be in the possession of someone else. In the realm of questions and answers, this particularly makes sense, since most children learn initially that adults hold the solution to whatever stumps them. The argument therefore turns on the claim that even if Kappus found someone who professed to have such answers and wanted to pass them on, they could not be taken in. Kappus can only receive what he is prepared to live. And he is not yet ready to think or be: those answers could only be lived by someone else.

The general educational significance of this point should be clear. If we imagine the passage addressing nineteen-year-old students today, we can read it as urging them not to look for teachers, inside or outside schools, to clear up the questions that most profoundly trouble them. Conversely, it is warning teachers that students who have not yet begun to think for themselves have no use for their solutions, their knowledge. Perhaps later, when these students’ conditions have changed and they have deliberately decided to enter vocational or professional education programs, they will know what to do with the expertise the teacher is communicating. Or maybe earlier, when the students are virtually unaware that they must begin to be distinct selves, they can absorb the standard forms of literacy in K–12 education as an extension of the family in which they are absorbed. When a student awakens to the challenge to exist as an individual, however, other people’s answers will appear meaningless. Accordingly, Rilke offers none.

So is there nothing educators can do for such students? Rilke’s positive argument is that we can help them alter the way they regard questions. In childhood, questions tend to be
closely linked to demands that children and adults make on each other; later in adulthood, questions are often a formulation of social problems to be cooperatively solved. But when a person is struggling to think for oneself about what and how to love, the questions come to one from oneself. How shall one begin to respond constructively? According to Rilke, by devoting oneself to these questions not as means to an end but as ends in themselves.

What he is calling for may be viewed as loosely analogous to Kant’s conception of the aesthetic attitude. To love a question for its beauty would be to marvel at what it presents to the imagination—how it may remind us, for instance, of an undisturbed room or a book of secrets, or more generally, of a vision of the world that we may not fully understand but that is accompanied by delight and an affirmative judgment—without taking an interest in how the question’s existence may make a difference to us, how it may help gratify some desire. Why do I feel so estranged from the world that claims me? Instead of trying to figure out how to make this pain go away, I could seek to appreciate the world of this question; I could speculate on how the things I have experienced support and are supported by this sense of strangeness. Dedicating myself to a question in this way means transforming it from a demand or problem into a wonder. Furthermore, behind every question there is a chain of others; I could respond to one by drawing out its implications, and so its wonder, in related questions.

Why would anyone want to do this? To appreciate the beauty above is to see that this particular question is out of order: like the un-Cartesian doubts that may flood one unburdened, beauty moves us by surprise. A question’s beauty is inherently delightful prior to the formation of any desire requiring satisfaction. And this priority returns us to the condition of being before all beginning as well as to the challenge of living this state. Here is Kappus, or our nineteen-year-old student, struggling to start to think, love, and exist, wrestling with questions that seemingly hold him back. He is tempted to try on the answers of others, but that would simply trap him in an existence not his own. His only authentic way forward is to live the state of irresolution; we may interpret this act of living in an existentialist sense as one of thoughtfully, decisively, affirmatively choosing to be this unresolved person, the sort of being Sartre calls free. Is there anything anyone could do to encourage such a person to accept the anguish and isolation that is part of this freedom? Rilke draws attention to its beauty expressed by its questions. By wholeheartedly claiming these questions, he teaches Kappus, Kappus may begin to be himself.

And the answers? Oddly, Rilke concludes by beckoning toward the possibility of gradually and unconsciously living one’s way into “the” answer. Notwithstanding his stern warning elsewhere in the correspondence against the use of irony, I detect a touch of that in these last words. If one truly gives oneself over to loving the questions themselves, then one’s provisional responses will serve only to extend the questions into other realms, never to resolve them. In this sense, the questions have no answers. However, the singular and integrative answer that may occur to one sometime in the future, an answer to the whole chain of questions one has lived through, can always take the form of a history of what one has made of them. Such a narrative is likely to have its tragic side, though—hence the bite of irony—in that it would be the story of how confused desires eventually produced a work of beauty, if not, perhaps, actual satisfaction.

Liberal education
We are now in a position to come back to our central concerns. Does Rilke’s passage shed any light on the kind of questions that should distinguish liberal education from other kinds of education? Does it suggest some specific approaches liberal educators could take to help the Kappuses in their classes? And does it leave us with any confidence that these questions and approaches are still pertinent today?

If we take the passage to articulate an idea of liberal education, then we may identify three features of the questions on which this education focuses. First, the questions are ones rooted in what the student seriously cares about, ones in which the student’s own thinking and self-understanding are at stake. They cannot be ones to which the student is
obligated to reply. They concern not the rewards of others but the student’s very existence as a whole and distinct person. Second, these questions can only be answered, in the historical and ironic sense explained above, by the questioner. Students in the grip of them cannot be saved by savants, however much they may want to be. And finally, these questions nevertheless may be loved for their beauty, be appreciated for the way they evoke wonder at the world they illuminate. They thus turn our attention away from the blurry objects of our contradictory desires toward what is given prior to desire. By patiently devoting ourselves to the beauty of the unresolved heart, we may begin to claim our existence and live in response to its gift.

The questions of liberal education, in short, are the student’s own questions; more precisely, they are those of the student who is struggling to be himself or herself. How, then, could a liberal educator aid such students? Would that not be a better task for a therapist? Not necessarily. Without delving into students’ personal experiences (and entering into a shaky transference relationship), a teacher could encourage them to cast their questions in a language significantly different from the one they already possess. Such a language may be learned from texts that stand at some distance from their world. By coaching students in the close reading of such works, the teacher may enable them to master new forms for representing recognizable experiences, ones that illuminate and emphasize unfamiliar features. If the teacher can also create opportunities and incentives for them to practice freely and thoughtfully criticizing these forms, students may grow used to employing them to acknowledge and articulate questions that are otherwise hard to talk about directly. The liberal educator would thus be helping students to translate their existential questions into another world of related experiences.

To what purpose? Rilke’s two arguments clarify the rationale. First, this practice of translation would replace and block that of providing authoritative answers. Liberal education would distinguish itself from other kinds of education, on the one hand, by its scrupulous acknowledgment of ignorance, one enforced by the divergent and opposing viewpoints it entertains in order to nourish renewed questioning. And second, this practice would amount to a broadening of the students’ questions that promises to deepen the students’ wonder. Echoing our original, given metaphor, which may have its uses after all, the liberal educator can invite students to love the beauty of their questions by enlarging the reach of these questions. This would be the positive aim that distinguishes his or her approach from that of other educators.

Evidently, we would need to develop some much more specific examples of this educational approach, ones tailored to concrete circumstances, and to test these in rigorous experiments before we could place much confidence in this vision of liberal education. I have been merely spinning an initial theory out of an interpretation of Rilke’s passage. Obviously, too, I owe alternative interpretations and possible objections a more substantial hearing and response. I merely wanted to begin to plumb the theory’s suggestiveness. Before I end for now, though, I should say a few words in explanation of why I find this vision pertinent to our contemporary world.

As I observed at the start, one main thing driving the suspicion that liberal education is a dinosaur is the ever more frantic pace at which all that is solid is melting into air. Whatever postmodernity is supposed to be, it has not displaced disorientation as a central feature of our experience. A surmise that should retain interest for us, then, is that this disorientation may be tightly linked to our free nature, perhaps as an experiential effect of that freedom, perhaps as something that causes us to experience freedom as predominantly freedom from determination. Such an existentialist understanding of freedom thus continues to pose a vital question for how we make sense of our (post-)modernity with its many conflicts, such as that between secularization and fundamentalism. An education that addresses this charged sense of freedom would be an important liberal education for us today.

REFERENCE


NOTE

1 Kappus’s introduction may be found in the earlier English edition of the letters: Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a young poet, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: Norton, 1954), 11–13.
Most of us who work in higher education are, at our cores, concerned with the “essence” of college, with helping our students come to know themselves and, to quote Matthew Arnold (2006, 5), “the best which has been thought and said in the world.” We try to convey the best of what has been developed in our area of scholarship and to liberally educate our students in its traditions. Our students want to prepare for vocation and to develop their social and intellectual skills. Yet, especially as they make the transition from high school to college, students also want answers to the “Big Questions” of meaning and value. As shown in classic studies of cognitive development among college students and young professionals (see Perry 1999; Knefelkamp 1999; Knefelkamp and Slepitz 1978), high school graduates come to college seeking a set of “right” answers; they leave, older and wiser, as committed relativists. The trick is to keep them asking the Big Questions as they develop intellectually in our academies.

Our students are spiritual. According to a study of student religiosity conducted by the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA), 80 percent of students express a strong interest in spirituality (Astin et al. 2005). This could, of course, refer to a kind of Emersonian transcendentalism. But they are not only spiritual, they are religious. Over half of all students attend religious services at least once per month. Indeed, according to the UCLA study, eight students in ten attended religious services during the past year. Even if some went grudgingly with their families, that’s a very large number. Moreover, almost eight students in ten believe in God. The new college student may need to exert independence from hearth and family, but sometimes even that age-typical separation takes a surprising turn. A recent issue of the Wall Street Journal featured an article on children who become more religious than their parents (Rosman 2007).

The faculty and the questions we ask
Although there is a strong counter-current to piety on college and university campuses, a faculty survey included in the UCLA study revealed that about 80 percent of professors consider themselves to be spiritual persons. We professors haven’t forgotten the Big Questions either. As in all surveys, however, the “devil” or the “deity” is in the details. Faculty in religious colleges and small liberal colleges are more spiritual than their counterparts in large public or private universities. In addition to correlating with type of school, it relates to

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Faith and Reason

The “solution” to the faith-reason debate—at least for the university—is not to solve it but to study it and to let it enrich the curriculum.

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on Campus

academic specialization: when asked if colleges should be concerned with students’ spiritual development, the greatest agreement came from faculty in health sciences, humanities, and education; the least came from faculty in the physical and biological sciences.

The current “crisis,” the one that gets a lot of press, is the “faith-reason” fight. I follow it because I teach biological psychology (from an evolutionary perspective) in an institution associated with Orthodox Judaism. I don’t find a conflict; but so many people do that I sometimes wonder if I am missing something interesting—or at least fun. I quoted Matthew Arnold above because he was, in the 1860s, the quintessential humanist—classicist, poet, and defender of belles lettres—and because he got into a spat with Thomas Huxley about the relative roles of literature and science. (Religious questions were certainly lurking in their argument.) One of the most cited poems in all of English literature, Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” concludes:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Troubled by the import of continental higher criticism of the Bible and by that very Victorian British product, Darwinian evolution, Arnold wrote the poem in 1861. Nearly a century and a half later, armies (each proclaiming the other’s ignorance) are still clashing over the same shoals of religion and science. And students are perplexed.

Reason and faith on campus
Since the Enlightenment, scholars have had a tough time handling religion. Religion is not just about faith and reason. It is also about emotions, self-examination, social perceptions and evaluations, and prejudices. The “solution” to the faith-reason debate—at least for the university—is not to solve it but to study it and to let it enrich the curriculum.

William James, in The Will to Believe and The Varieties of Religious Experience, set the stage for a solution by introducing a radical shift in epistemology. In offering pragmatism as the framework for knowledge, James birthed all of American psychology and a
good chunk of philosophy. That which drives humankind and forms the basis of the “passional hypotheses” by which we live is the proper subject of psychology—including the psychology of religion. We may not be able to prove or disprove the existence of God by empirical methods, but we can evaluate its effects on human behavior.

James’s pragmatism is not a bad formula for bringing the mysterium into the light of scientific analysis. In fact, the recent proposal by Harvard University’s general education committee for a “Reason and Faith” requirement was part of an effort to move toward a values-centered curriculum. The proposal was withdrawn, following rationalist critique, as being too narrow; but for some, the entire curriculum was too values-oriented. In almost every curricular reform, there is a point of contention over the sciences or other positivistic disciplines. Do we teach “appreciation” or “how to do it”? Do we teach “about it” or “it”?

So, there may be a bit of a conflict on campus. Conflicts are good. In the academy, argumentation, reason, analysis, and debate are the tools by which knowledge is advanced and transmitted. Culture wars are things outside our walls; they are made into course topics, taught, and savored as social problems. The historical examples form good literature: Galileo and the church; Socrates and the Athenian governors; Biblical Aaron arguing for the human need to represent concretely the divine versus his brother Moses’s insistence on abstract logocentrism; Creon and Antigone disputing the role of conscience and authority. Safely distant, they may leave our cores untouched. But what happens when the culture war—or conflict of civilizations—passes through the walls of today’s academy? What happens when the fundamental questions about which students fret are preempted by the debates of scholars? There may be a conflict between student educational need and scholarly debate. Indeed, just such a conflict may be occurring now.

Some sources of the conflict
There have been intra-campus conflicts before now. The medieval European university, based on the trivium and quadrivium (the former an instantiation of the trinity), evolved into a rather more scientific institution in the German universities that emphasized detailed, systematic knowledge (Wissenschaft). In the twentieth century, the American university democratized the system, producing a “culture of aspiration” in which students might enter the academy based on merit rather than background. The historical transitions through which the university passed led to conflicts as bloody as those we have in the contemporary university. Arnold, as inspector of schools (a monad cohabiting the same body as the scholar/poet), strove for a classical education bringing “sweetness and light” to a materialist British culture threatened by modernism (evolution, scholastic study of religion).

Today, it sometimes appears to be a shouting match. Instead of two sets of players, there are three: the rational atheists, the theistic religionists, and the postmodernists who deny the possibility of any permanent value system or Lyotardian “metanarrative,” whether scientific or religious (Lyotard 1984).

Perry (1999), Boyer (2002), Knefelkamp (1999), Astin (Astin et al. 2005), and Kuh (Kuh & Whitt 1988)—the psychometricians of the undergraduate mind—have commented on the need for values clarification. Most American students in most of the country are religious—certainly more religious than the faculty, particularly the science faculty—and are struggling with family relations; they are trying to make their way in a twenty-first-century rendering of Arnold’s “darkling plain.” Though the Wall Street Journal article mentioned above describes students who turn more religious than their parents, the student arriving on campus and gelatinizing his or her parents’ religion is the canonical case. If Durkheim (2001) is right that society is bound together by religion, that God is society functionally, then this moving away is difficult indeed. This may be one of the reasons faith-based colleges are receiving support from parents afraid of “losing” their children.

The conflict between “religious” and “secular” is a complicated one. It is part of students’ evolving quest for self-definition. Anthropologists point out that virtually every human society has displayed ritualistic, religious, and/or supernaturally oriented behavior. Indeed, one of the most active areas of biological psychology today is the study of the evolutionary origins of the religious practices and beliefs as specialized forms of categorical thinking and behaving. Biologically speaking, religion is a
species-typical behavior; and species-typical behaviors have strong cognitive and motivational mechanisms driving the individual organisms comprising the species. The so-called biopsychological roots of religion are not only matters of faith and reason. There is also an emotional tug, a set of “aha” experiences.

Religion is a universal. It works best not only when it is rational, but also when it contains that “something special.” Scholars in religious studies have been discussing what’s “special” for a long time. There is almost always something visceral in it, certainly something emotional. Faith and reason are cognitive abilities; they are “believing in” and “believing that.” The human condition also includes emotions, allowing us to experience feelings of awe. One of the pioneers in the study of religion, Rudolph Otto (1950, 12), grappled with the extra-rational “mystery” of the religious experience. Non-rational should not be confused with irrational, he warns. He describes it as numinous: “The feeling…may come sweeping like a gentle tide…. It may pass…continuing…thrillingly vibrant and resonant.” Otto drew the analogy between religion and the perception of beauty. To move one step beyond discussions of beauty, and to cite one of Woody Allen’s best lines—perhaps mixing sacred and profane—sex is dirty “only if you do it right.” Religion is fullest precisely when it is more than cognitive.

There can also be a negative side to the emotive or religious experience: the discomfort of the adolescent asking the Big Questions that sometimes have unhappy answers. At the most extreme, depression or angst can occur—even in the most religious of college environments.
Adolescent, collegiate despair has no more extreme value than that represented by Theodore Kaczynski, the so-called “Unabomber.” I knew Ted slightly; we were classmates at Harvard. The good news is that we knew he was strange; the bad news is that he wasn’t the strangest “dude” on campus. (Many of the other strange ones got tenure.) In Harvard and the Unabomber (2002), Alston Chase describes Kaczynski’s reaction as one of “despair.” Despair is a very good word; it is the antipode, not of faith, but of joy; it is the “bad news” countering the “good news” (of the evangelist). Chase deconstructs Kaczynski—the child of an unhappy home, a student who was perhaps admitted to college too young, and most telling for our purposes, the product of an inherently conflicted general education curriculum at Harvard. Based upon the positivism of the natural sciences and mathematics, on the one hand, and the goal of inculcating a humanistic (Christian American) set of values on the other, Chase sees the Harvard general education curriculum of the 1950s and 1960s as being at war with itself. From humanists, Kaczynski learned that science threatened civilization; from the science faculty, he learned that positivistic science cannot be stopped. This led to an irreconcilable conflict—and to either madness (a defense rejected by the legal system) or anarchic despair.

While an extreme, the case of the Unabomber points to the role of intellectual conflict—coupled, to be sure, with idiosyncratic biographical influences—in the production of psychological tensions during the adolescent years. According to Perry (1999) and Knefelkamp (1999), most students adjust and adopt a somewhat relativistic acceptance of differing points of view. The argument I offer here is that it is quite proper for universities to address intellectual questions that concern students. Each faculty member will do so within a discipline and within a worldview.

**Contemporary conditions**

In part, the “Reason and Faith” requirement was dropped from the current Harvard curriculum review because of concerns about why, of all the cultural questions, this particular question was being privileged. The larger question is whether the curriculum was too values-oriented. This is the same question raised by the 1950s Harvard general education curriculum. Probably, the question has been asked in some form on every campus in America. So, let’s take a look at a few works that have been disseminated widely in the academic community. It is not really faith versus reason as process but the subject of each. Reason is a set of mental operations (studied by cognitive scientists) that are used by organisms to derive conclusions or hypothesis from certain premises. It is the premises that are in question. The subject can be the structure of the atom, the nature of a deity, or the smile of the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland. None has ever been seen—at least by the ordinary naked eye. However, all have been described, discussed, and analyzed by reason. The argument does not really pit faith against reason. Rather, it concerns whether both can be legitimately applied within an individual’s worldview. The first citation, a defense of coupling faith and reason within the religious framework, was written by an eminent Catholic theologian:

Critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvelous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind…. The scientific ethos, moreover, is… the will to be obedient to the truth, and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the Christian spirit…. Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based.

The second is the work of an eminent biologist: the God Hypothesis [holds that] there exists a super-human, supernatural intelligence, who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it... “the God hypothesis” is a scientific hypothesis about the universe, which should be analyzed as skeptically as any other…. The third is a counter-attack against the atheist. It asserts that God is not like any other object of empirical scientific investigation. When philosophers of religion refer to God in ordinary language, they are doing so for convenience in communication, not for analytical explication. A Jewish philosopher once argued strenuously...
that God is neither actually body nor a potentiality in a body (a proposition dealing with the Father, separate from the critical Christian theology surrounding the nature of Jesus’s relation to the Father):

We are to believe that he is incorporeal, that His unity is physical neither potentially nor actually….None of the attributes can be predicated of Him, neither motion, nor rest, for example….Whenever Scripture describes Him in corporeal terms like walking, standing, sitting, speaking, and the like, it speaks metaphorically….The Torah speaks in human language….He has no body at all, actually or potentially.

Oh, the sources. The first, the eminent Catholic theologian, is Pope Benedict XVI (2006); the second, the eminent biologist and the primate of evangelical atheists, is the Oxford evolutionist Richard Dawkins (2006, 2, 31); the third is the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1972, 418) articulating the third of his thirteen articles of faith incumbent on Jews.

Dawkins concludes that intelligence is the product of Darwinian evolution and that evolutionary process is the only true basis for values. Rejecting faith as superstition, Dawkins is continuing the Enlightenment program—particularly the British post-Enlightenment distilled through positivist science, which rejects anything not empirically verifiable and observable. Since the natural theological basis for the existence of a deity has largely diminished over the past two centuries, but the urge to find reasons for design in nature has grown, there are two separate responses. This history has been chronicled most thoroughly by the philosopher Michael Ruse (2004, 2006), who speaks of evolutionary studies as three sets of
inquiries: a set of facts or observations, a theory, and an explanatory system. This last, which he calls “evolutionism,” has been battling “creationism,” which originated in a rather restricted interpretation of the Bible that has developed largely in America and has been driven largely by fundamentalist Christians, with a few Jews thrown in to provide ecumenical balance.

Dawkins and his supporters are, I believe, responding to a rise in politico-religious fundamentalism, which has intruded on the scientific enterprise with concepts like Intelligent Design. This concept is not new; it was raised to counter Darwin—in fact, versions of the argument are ancient. But it has taken on a new political life. Science is now on the defensive, at least in conservative American political circles. While there are religious scientists who are trying to keep religious doctrine and scientific reasoning in proper perspective, it is not just the positivist scientist who pits faith against reason as an essential dialectic. Some religious fundamentalists do the same, and when they win a school board vote, it sets our teeth on edge. “Faith” and “reason” used in this way represent a Lyotardian differend—a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a
rule of judgment applicable to both arguments (Lyotard 1988). The rules of logical positivism preclude papal speculation on reason operating upon a faith-based revelation. Scriptural literalism precludes empirical evidence that apparently contradicts revelation. Both science and religion are being gutted; both specific faith and reason are being attacked by a postmodernism according to which no single metanarrative can attain truth. The Church could suppress Galileo; the postmodern philosopher can now deny both Galileo and the Church as authoritative sources of “truth.”

(Temporary) truce?
So, where does this leave the discourse on campus? If students take a course in the philosophy of science or evolution, they will come upon some of these arcane questions. I guarantee, though, that they will go back to the dorms and talk about leading the “good life.” Some scientists, who may also be religious practitioners, will continue to examine how evolution and biology interact with modern theology. I suggest that we continue the debate but that, this time, we include the students. Departments of literature offer courses in utopias and dystopias. James’s monumental work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which is standard reading now in psychology and religion courses, could be brought into a new course: “The Varieties of Irreligious Experience.” Sociologists, psychologists, and political scientists are all concerned with the rise of global political fundamentalism. In Divinity schools, faculty study “It”; they prepare ministers, priests, and rabbis. These schools often have eminent scholars who could teach “About It” to undergraduates, without violating anyone’s intellectual integrity. Why is religion universal? Is it biological? Why did the pope’s lecture, excerpted above, include a section criticizing the use of violence in spreading the word of God that lead to mass protests and to the shooting of four nuns by angry fundamentalists?

Teaching the Big Questions means just that: the Big Questions stay. Disciplines emerge; we gain new tools; we accumulate new art and literature and new philosophical arguments. But the questions remain part of the human enterprise. We should teach all of it. Matthew Arnold would approve.

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EACH GENERATION of students inevitably must confront anew the fundamental questions of meaning and value that have vexed human beings down through the ages. What does it mean to be human? How ought a human being to live? What makes a meaningful and satisfying life? What are my values? What are my obligations to others? How can I understand suffering and death?

As students have struggled with such “Big Questions,” individually and collectively, liberal education has traditionally sought to provide them with a variety of cultural and historical perspectives, as well as to foster their analytical ability to confront and explore answers, necessarily provisional and often competing, for themselves. In practice, however, there are significant challenges, from lack of student interest and faculty expertise to the persistence of inadequate professional paradigms and reward structures.

What are the Big Questions that engage today’s students? Is exploring those questions a legitimate part of liberal education as we understand it today? If so, how adequately are they being dealt with? How could we do better?

Following are four responses. Readers are strongly encouraged to contribute additional responses online at www.aacu.org/liberaleducation, where they will be published as they are received.

Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin

GIVEN THAT MOST of the great literary and philosophical traditions that constitute the core of a liberal education are grounded in the maxim “know thyself,” we believe that the Big Questions are fundamental to the ideals and values of liberal learning. Self-understanding, of course, is a necessary prerequisite to our ability to understand others and to resolve conflicts. This basic truth—which lies at the heart of our difficulty in dealing effectively with problems of violence, poverty, crime, divorce, substance abuse, and religious and ethnic conflict that continue to plague our country and our world—was also dramatically and tragically illustrated by the events of September 11, 2001.

Such considerations led us in 2003 to undertake a six-year national study of students’ spiritual development in American higher education. Funded by grants to the University of California–Los Angeles’ Higher Education Research Institute from the John Templeton Foundation, this longitudinal project has already revealed a high level of interest in spiritual issues and spiritual questions on the part of undergraduates. Our surveys show that two-thirds of the students express a strong interest in spiritual matters, and that similar numbers demonstrate a substantial level of religious commitment and engagement. But their existential search can be rocky at times, and their
spiritual struggles can distress them psychologically and cause them to have doubts about the self and its worth. As one student told us in a focus group interview, “a question I’ve been dealing with is… what is the point of college? [What does] the fact that we’re paying for this education so that we can make money later in life… have to do with the grand scheme of things?”

How are colleges responding to such challenges? Well over half of the students report that their professors never encourage discussions of religious or spiritual matters, and about the same proportion reports that professors never provide opportunities to discuss the purpose or meaning of life. The faculty themselves show a considerable division of opinion when it comes to the role of spiritual issues in higher education. While majorities of faculty believe that enhancing self-understanding, developing moral character, and helping students develop their personal values should be either essential or very important goals of undergraduate education, only about a third say the same for “facilitating students’ spiritual development.” On the other hand, four in five faculty members consider themselves to be “spiritual persons,” and more than two-thirds are “seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually.”

By raising public awareness of the important role that spirituality plays in student learning and development, by alerting academic administrators, faculty, and curriculum committees to the importance of spiritual development, and by identifying possible strategies for enhancing that development, it is our hope to encourage institutions to give greater priority to these spiritual aspects of students’ educational and personal development. As Wellesley College President Diana Chapman Walsh, a member of the national advisory board for the project, expresses it, “we can create time and space… for faculty, students, and staff to honor their inner lives, when, if, and how they choose…. The freedoms we scholars treasure need not be threatened by opening ourselves to the spiritual dimensions of teaching, learning, and knowing, need not deny the possibility of a kind of knowing that comes from heart and soul. These forms of knowing should be sought not instead of the intellect but in partnership with the intellect, in all its beauty and power.”

**Rebecca Chopp**

*Education, in its most basic sense, prepares students to understand the self and the world.*

Traditionally, the college years offer students the time and resources necessary to learn how to understand one’s self on the journey into responsible adulthood. As we provide students opportunities to explore the Big Questions in their lives, we should be sure that religion is a part of that exploration. As the Western tradition teaches, we hope for our students a life well lived and a life worth reflecting upon.

Teaching about religion should not be confused with handing out eternal dictates or requiring conversion. The language of theology, the aesthetics of religious experience, the power of community, and the morality of religious performance can all be explored in many ways through different departments and courses. At Colgate, a residential liberal arts institution, our students explore the making of meaning through our core curriculum but

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also through courses in areas such as ethics, religion, the arts, history, literature, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology.

A large and diverse campus ministries program and our Center for Outreach, Volunteerism, and Education help students shape habits of meaning for themselves and their communities. Chapel House, a non-sectarian spiritual center and retreat, offers students and others a place for peaceful contemplation. Our approach in teaching about meaning is not about giving answers, but about providing a variety of approaches to how human beings make meaning and offering a variety of opportunities to create habits of meaning making.

Education teaches one how to understand the world as well as the self. For the last fifty years, higher education has been dominated by a naive belief that the educated world is leaving religion behind and that the secular world will trump all. Wrong on both counts. In the contemporary study of religion in the world and the world of religion, we need to understand that religion can be a powerful force for good and for bad. Religion in its many forms is taught across the curriculum and in special campus-wide programs.

Serious exploration of religion as a force in the world is part of our programs in peace and conflict studies as well as departments such as international relations and political science. Several years ago, our Center for Ethics and World Societies sponsored a campus-wide series of programs on politics and religion. And our religion department today offers courses in Hinduism, Native American religions, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. An active off-campus study program in which 68 percent of our students participate provides opportunities to explore religion in the world in a variety of local contexts.

Though Baptist in origin, Colgate is now a non-sectarian community in which humanists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and agnostics live together—quite parallel to the twenty-first-century world in which our students will live and lead. No questions can be “off-bounds” in the critical thinking of the liberal arts. All questions of self and world most certainly belong in the liberal arts curriculum of the twenty-first century.

Andrew Delbanco

“WHY ARE WE HERE, GENTLEMEN?” was the rhetorical question with which Samuel Eliot Morison liked to begin his American history seminar at Harvard in the 1950s. I’ve been told by a witness that on one occasion a mischievous student asked him to clarify whether he was asking about their place in the university or in the cosmos. “Professor Morison,” he said, with a glance around the room, “do you mean, why are we here”—and then, with a papal gesture of upturned palms and a heavenward roll of his eyes—“or, why are we here?”

As this student well knew, in the modern academy this latter kind of Big Question tends, as we would say today, to be “checked at the door.” It is a question unanswerable by objective inquiry; it throws us back on traditions or intuitions or articles of faith, all of which have a place in the secular university as objects of study but not as sources of knowledge.

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Yet students are still asking such questions, and always will. What does that mean for people trying to be responsible educators?

One approach is to leave the students to their own devices—to dorm-room colloquies with one another, or, perhaps, to organizations sponsored by the campus ministry. That is pretty much what most institutions have chosen to do—a choice based on a sound awareness, confirmed over centuries, of how quick adults can be to indoctrinate young people if given half a chance. The laissez-faire norm of the modern university is a great achievement and should not be lightly discarded or even slightly modified.

So what to do for our students while defending their freedom to answer such questions on their own? It’s actually pretty simple, I think. Put in front of them some sample of great texts (we can argue forever over exactly which ones—so we should put aside that temptation and get on with it) that place the Big Questions front and center, and let the discussion begin. In small groups. Led by sympathetic but rigorous teachers who know something about the texts and their genealogies and applications. An occasional lecture from someone who knows a lot about the texts can be helpful too.

A college may require such engagement from every student and encourage participation by a sufficient number of faculty to serve all students every year. Or it may make such a curriculum optional, thereby at least serving those who are inclined to take advantage of it. I prefer the former because students who think they already know the answers, or that the answers are unknowable and therefore not worth pursuing, might change their minds.

The specialized professionalism of the faculty and the cost of small-group education make mounting such a curriculum very difficult today. Still, it may be worth trying harder than most institutions have done over the last fifty years or so. For one thing, this kind of teaching has benefits for faculty too, since it can save them from creeping anxiety about the value of writing books that other faculty will have to read in order to write their own books.

Of course, research and writing have their own rewards, but nothing like having a student come to you and say, “I feel I’m starting to figure out what to do with my life, and your class made a difference.”

**Samuel Speers**

The Big Questions I see students asking have to do with the integrative work of the liberal arts: how are students to link their learning and their evolving sense of what matters to them? As director of an office of religious and spiritual life, I’ve come to see unexamined secular assumptions as an unexpected site for engaging such questions. Secular traditions freed us from privileging any single worldview (religious or otherwise) in pursuing a just and open society, even as the secular privileging of neutral reason is lurking in the background of our present difficulty seeing wonder as integral to the intellectual life. In this brief response, I want to suggest that the secular ethos at a number of our campuses provides a way of seeing some of the obstacles to engaging students’ Big Questions.

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While defining the secular in its multiple and changing forms could itself qualify as a Big Question, secularity in my context generally refers to the understanding that religious commitments are private matters of personal choice and that most public campus discussions (in the classroom and beyond it) are best run without reference to particular religious commitments or visions of ultimate reality. Yet now leading scholars wonder if our commitments to secularity really guarantee more critical thought, more democratic institutions, more flourishing community life; do the liberating intentions of Western secularity strip some students and faculty of fundamental aspects of their identity? Is secularity truly neutral?

These questions are important to our renewed attention to engaging students’ Big Questions—and not only because they point at our limited understanding of the transformations of the religious in modernity. Even more, these questions reveal the need to look critically at whether our secular frameworks are ample enough. Writing about U.S. civic life more generally, political scientist (and atheist) William Connolly (1999, 6) turns to visceral language to describe our dilemma, arguing that our “secular models of thinking, discourse, and ethics are too constipated to sustain the diversity they seek to admire.” For Connolly and others, our notions of the secular pay insufficient attention to how important the affective dimensions of our experience are to critical thought and the wonder that nourishes it. Yet it’s the integration of these elements—the affective and the analytical—that is so crucial for the development of sustaining commitments to the urgent questions our students are asking. Too often, these aspects of students’ identity and formation are uncoupled from our campus’ intellectual life and made largely private in student life.

Thanks to a grant from the Teagle Foundation’s “Fresh Thinking” initiatives, I’m part of a consortium of campuses that seeks to bring these developing discussions about secularisms and the public sphere to bear upon the mission of the liberal arts college. We believe that one way students’ Big Questions can be more effectively engaged is by addressing the separations constructed by secularity’s organizing force. Students struggle to integrate their own commitments with their learning in part because of secularism’s legacies—including the professionalization and specialization of academic disciplines, and the emergence of student life programming and services as its own non-curricular field. By bringing together faculty and chaplains, we are trying to address the separation faculty and student-life administrators themselves feel between their personal and professional lives (or aspects of them), and between their campus specialty and the rest of college life. Through a range of initiatives, including qualitative research, curricular development, seminars and discussions, and a public conference, we hope to open up wider conversation nationally about whether and how the secular container for the liberal arts compartmentalizes the experiences our students are trying to integrate.

REFERENCE
The problem in the humanities today is that we have twenty-first-century students, a twentieth-century curriculum, and a nineteenth-century bureaucracy. Administrators hate to be called bureaucrats. They prefer to be seen as academic leaders. Leaders articulate priorities and values, serve as exemplars, and represent an institution to both others and itself. Today, more than ever, the humanities and the arts need academic leaders at every level of the university to give them voice, to avow their importance, to articulate the ways in which the humanities and arts speak for the university, the ways in which they give speech to the central values and value of a liberal education. Yet having been a dean for close to a decade, I am aware that leadership takes place in an institutional and human infrastructure: a political landscape, a network of administrative hierarchies, faculty and academic senate committees, academic units with budgets, constituencies, needs, and responsibilities. Both day-to-day management and strategic planning take place in a bureaucracy, for better or for worse. The challenge for academic leaders, it seems to me, is to think through bureaucracy.

I mean by this that we need to understand administration as an intellectual problem, that we need to understand the intellectual stakes of bureaucracy. Thinking through bureaucracy suggests getting past bureaucracy but it also means thinking in bureaucracy, understanding bureaucracy as a space in which thinking can occur, a mechanism through which thinking must take place. We must work through bureaucracy because it is an obstacle and because it is the means to our ends. Leadership requires us to work through the institutional structures that both constrain and empower the humanities. The health of the humanities depends on our ability to reinvigorate the academic bureaucracy that the humanities inhabit, especially the departments that define our teaching and research.

After the release of Reinvigorating the Humanities: Enhancing Research and Education on Campus and Beyond, the 2004 report of the Association of American Universities, a University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), faculty task force organized a campus discussion called “Humanities@UCSB: A 21st Century Perspective.” But due to a typographical error, or a Freudian slip, a flyer appeared with the title “Humanities@UCSB: A 20th-Century Perspective.” This made me wonder if our perspective was in fact forward-thinking enough, or, indeed, retrospective enough to avoid the common perception that one’s present situation is somehow outside of history. In fact, it seems to me that the problem in the humanities today is that we have twenty-first-century students, a twentieth-century curriculum, and a nineteenth-century bureaucracy. Faculty to some extent occupy all three spheres, which overlap but do not coincide.

The landscape of academic departments and disciplines in the humanities has changed over the last two hundred years, yet there is remarkable continuity in the modern liberal arts university. We can see the traces of the classical expectation that citizens be trained in philosophy, history, and rhetoric, as well as the medieval map of the liberal arts, which included grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The university of the future will and should maintain many of the disciplines and pedagogical principles established in ancient and medieval times. It will continue to need coherent canons of knowledge in order to educate its students and establish areas of expertise with which to evaluate its own ongoing work. It will need stable budgetary units that will be receptive to but not buffeted by new academic trends. Furthermore, students, even graduate students, cannot be post-disciplinary if they are pre-disciplinary. We need majors and degree programs in order to have interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and education. The departmental structure will not become obsolete. The challenge lies in figuring out how, when, and where to rewrite the map of the changing academic landscape that we navigate.

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Disciplines and departments

Here is a thought experiment: imagine that one summer after graduation ceremonies, we disbanded all of our academic departments in the humanities and told the faculty to come back in the fall organized into bureaucratic and academic configurations of their choice. Here are the ground rules: no one would lose his or her job, and the budgets and the total number of faculty and staff FTE would be guaranteed for, say, five years. At the same time, faculty would be expected to teach about the same number of majors and non-majors, prepare graduate students for jobs, and maintain a curriculum that would allow students to fulfill university requirements. (We won’t let six senior faculty form the Department of Advanced Heidegger Studies and teach only courses requiring fluency in German and ancient Greek.) In addition, units would have to ensure peer review and expert evaluations for advancements and promotions.

What would happen? Many faculty would be energized by the imaginative and practical enterprise of defining an engaging intellectual community and devising a pedagogical plan in a new major. Some, for personal or intellectual reasons, would be happy to reproduce their previous departments. (Of course, some faculty are not really interested in redefining the shape of the humanities but are unhappy in their own departments and would prefer to be unhappy in another department.) The conditions for both new and old programs would be the same: a critical mass of faculty must support the curriculum, teach the students, and
formulate an intellectual rationale for their fields. There would be political considerations. Departments often police borders and regulate citizenship. Would the fall of the humanities’ Berlin Walls mean the dissolution of empires and nation-states into regions and ethnic identifications, or greater unification? Would the new humanities division look like the Israeli Knesset or the Italian Parliament, coalitions of splinter groups trying to exert their influence, or would we see a European Union? Would faculty look for powerful departments, creating a giant history, English, or cultural studies department to function like Russia in the former Soviet Union?

We might see humanities departments that look similar to what we have now—English, French, Spanish—but organized along interdisciplinary lines, including faculty from outside traditional humanities departments. Or we might see interdisciplinary programs defined by the periodization that currently slices departments, such as eighteenth-century studies or modernism. We might see more programs organized by other collective identities, such as gender or racial and ethnic groups. Surely there would be more alliances with the humanistic social sciences. Would we see more departments of performance studies or visual studies?

Many of our literature departments are organized around fictions of national literatures, inflected by vestiges of colonial history. Is a common language or a political/genealogical narrative of literary history an adequate organizing principle for a department? English departments currently contain multitudes: British, American, Native American, post-colonial, Asian American, and Chicano and Chicana literatures. Spanish departments encompass a diversity of traditions, national literatures, and even languages. Influenced by cultural studies and the decline of foreign language teaching in high schools, some national literature departments already have reinvented themselves as cultural studies programs. We have programs in British studies, medieval studies, and Renaissance studies, bringing together historians, art historians, musicologists, and literary scholars. Would these programs replace our current departments?

Thinking about these intellectual configurations, it is instructive to observe how often they mirror professional societies. Indeed, many of the sixty-eight constituent societies of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) do not parallel an individual academic department, or would not have had a parallel academic department forty years ago. These organizations often mirror programs that exist alongside departments, between departments, often competing with departments for the time and teaching of their own faculty. Indeed, the history of the ACLS constituent societies interacts dynamically and dialogically with the history of our academic departments. Some learned societies mirror departments, some represent subfields within departments, some represent interdisciplinary alliances that may have begun when there were no cognate departments but have helped to establish departments, and others bring together scholars in interdisciplinary alliances precisely because they could not be mapped onto a single academic department or discipline. Think about the ways in which we could and could not superimpose the map of the ACLS constituent societies onto the map of the academic departments of a typical university.

Interdisciplinarity and the burden of the past

I hope it is clear that this is not the call for interdisciplinarity that you’ve read dozens of times. My point is that interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching are thriving. Humanities and arts faculty at UC Santa Barbara for example, are engaged in initiatives with engineering, nanotechnology, marine science, environmental science, and cognitive science, as well as with the social sciences. My point is that the academic leaders (at every level) who have developed programs for emerging and interdisciplinary fields have not fully succeeded in negotiating the bureaucratic relations between these initiatives and departments and disciplines.

Budgets, FTE lines, and majors, as well as the disciplinary border control that facilitates peer review, can make it difficult for departments to respond to interdisciplinary vectors of research and gradually shifting patterns of enrollments and instruction. Interdisciplinary programs and departments, joint appointments, and new majors and degrees have produced unintended side effects: misalignments between faculty and student FTE, misalignments between undergraduate and graduate programs, programs in which it is difficult for faculty to evaluate each other’s work, and departments whose faculty neglect their own curriculum (or want to) to
teach in other programs. Departments may prevent students from taking courses elsewhere, either because they are conscientiously committed to an expanding canon of knowledge and interdisciplinary methodologies, or because they need requirements to populate certain courses that faculty want to teach.

Furthermore, humanities programs face a particular challenge from their historical investment in and commitment to coverage. Humanists are not positivists. They believe in the advancement of knowledge, but for thousands of years the academy has been based on the presumption that intellectual innovation and discovery do not make previously acquired knowledge obsolete. We do not de-acquisition Cervantes from the library shelf because we read Latin American literature; we’re the ones who took all the volumes of Freud thrown out by the psychology department, the ones who teach Marx and Darwin and Goethe’s *Theory of Colors*. The humanities may be iconoclastic, but they engage in and with *traditions*, in the handing down and transmission of knowledge. New knowledge can come through archeological acts of discovery and rediscovery, through the exploration and mapping of previously neglected territories, and through the continual reinterpretation and reassessment of past, present, and future.

Yet if new subjects do not necessarily displace traditional ones, even as emphases and methodologies change, the expansion of the canon and the globalization of our curriculum present problems for departments. Humanities departments often base their curricular and FTE plans on a model of coverage, and are as reluctant to abandon areas as they are eager to expand canons and add approaches from other disciplines. Many departments redefine fields and adjust requirements; UC Santa Barbara has created digital humanities and digital arts positions, as well as positions in architecture and the environment, media policy, and borderlands history. Yet many departments request positions for new areas while insisting on *field coverage*—strength in all the core areas of a discipline at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Coverage can provide a reasonable rationale up to a point, but humanities departments need scholarly leadership to articulate more compelling arguments, both intellectually and rhetorically, to justify their resources and finally their bureaucratic identities.

**From teaching to research and back**

The problem of coverage is related to the bureaucratic and cultural disconnect between teaching and research that many humanities faculty experience. Although their teaching can inspire their research and their classrooms can be laboratories, they look with envy at their colleagues in the sciences who not only teach less but get teaching credit for research activities that result in publications and summer stipends. Humanities departments typically deliver student credit hours or student FTE rather than grants and contracts, and in general this makes them cost-effective and even profit centers for the university. Although their distinguished faculty conduct internationally recognized research, their institutional power tends to reside in their enrollments; and their annual delivery of a curriculum that fulfills a set of departmental and general education requirements simultaneously empowers and impoverishes them.

Some departments are changing themselves from within, reexamining their requirements, University of California, Santa Barbara
focusing on distinctive strengths, and creating emphases that give focus and coherence to majors. Faculty engage in innovative work in their articles and classrooms. On the bureaucratic level, however, interdisciplinary initiatives and research opportunities for faculty result in strain and loss for departments, leading departments to resist change. Faculty want to teach outside of their departments, or teach courses outside of their fields. Course buyouts seem inadequate and they downgrade the level of teaching in the home department. Entrepreneurial faculty who start research centers or special projects—funded and supported by administrators—end up feeling burdened or even exploited. They want course relief, which is then resented by their chairs. Joint appointments between departments and interdisciplinary programs can be an effective strategy but faculty complain about service obligations; the department and program can disagree about tenure cases. On the other hand, without joint departments, interdisciplinary programs can duplicate faculty in other programs, hiring literary scholars or historians or art historians on their own. We still have not solved the imaginative and bureaucratic problem of designing an academic landscape in which faculty live simultaneously in departments and interdepartmental and/or interdisciplinary programs.

Part of my strategy as dean has been to find ways to keep departments from experiencing interdisciplinary initiatives and research projects as loss. I have encouraged faculty and departments to think in terms of course credit rather than course relief, to find ways to give both faculty and students credit for these sorts of projects. When I offered funds for interdisciplinary curricular initiatives, I stipulated that courses had to be offered within departments. Our comparative literature program lets the home department of the instructor get all of the enrollment credit from its courses, which turns out to be a good deal for some departments with underpopulated courses. A summer theater lab involving visiting artist residencies created a parallel undergraduate course so students and faculty could get credit.

We have a variety of centers both in and between departments to organize research clusters and to integrate teaching and research to a greater extent, especially for graduate students. Some of these have been magnets for grants and philanthropic support. These include, among other centers, the Carsey-Wolf Center for Film, Television, and New Media, for which we’ve raised $10 million; the Walter H. Capps Center for Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life, for which we received a $500,000 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) matching grant that helped us to raise an additional $1.5 million; the English department’s Early Modern Center, which has just received a $325,000 NEH grant for an online English Ballad Archive project; and a digital humanities project that had early NEH seed funding and has spawned two University of California multi-campus research groups.

The success of these and other projects has led our faculty to propose a humanities lab initiative that would develop new paradigms for collaborative research projects in the humanities. These research projects would incorporate team-teaching and graduate student training. We need to break down the opposition between teaching and research in the humanities and make our ability to join the two an advantage rather than a liability. We have created freshman courses linked to our departmental centers, taught by graduate students, in an effort to create vertical integration across faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. We have created a postdoctoral fellow position (which includes some teaching) in our Early Modern Center. The challenge has been to locate these centers in and across departments in order to connect them to the life and teaching of the departments we want them to enrich rather than drain departmental resources. Some of them also have a public humanities component—especially the Capps Center and the Carsey-Wolf Center for Film, Television, and New Media (which works with the Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management on an environmental media initiative). Public programming has allowed us to draw a public audience. This includes philanthropic donors, but we need public engagement as much as we need funding.

The place and places of the humanities
In order to reinvigorate the humanities, academic leaders must take into account the need for strong departments and degree programs that address the intellectual and pedagogical demands of faculty and students drawn to interdisciplinary ventures. At the same time, we must design a landscape of departments in regional affiliations, confederations, and
alliances rather than the old model in which each department stands as an autonomous country with borders separating languages, cultures, and citizens. We may want to locate FTEs within academic departments yet make allocations that recognize research specializations and/or teaching responsibilities that address the interests of other departments and interdisciplinary programs.

It may be that the model of faculty living in the same department for their undergraduate and graduate programs will become obsolete. Someone might teach undergraduate courses in an English or history department yet work with graduate students (and other faculty) in a medieval studies research center. This is not a new model, at least outside of the humanities or outside of the United States, but it will require a rethinking of departments and degrees, and new paradigms for research, teaching, and public engagement in the humanities that lead to new bureaucratic paradigms.

There are many success stories in the humanities, but the very success of the humanities in reinvigorating itself has in some ways led to the creation of a shadow university in the programs and centers that lie in the interstices of the current structure. Strategic planning, the reinvention of the humanities that has occurred throughout the ages, must be carried out by the faculty, most of whom live in departments that can be agents of resistance rather than change, for both good and bad reasons. I have been suggesting that we acknowledge some of the good reasons. Abandoning traditional majors in many cases would be pedagogically unsound. Some worry about the fate of reading and literary analysis in cultural studies programs dominated by historical or sociological approaches. Furthermore, dismantling departments could represent strategic suicide if it takes away the rationale for a discipline and opens the door to downsizing and an indiscriminate assembling of humanities fields and faculty. Many faculty fear that administrators’ interest in interdisciplinarity masks an agenda to downsize, consolidate, and weaken departmental power structures.

This paranoid vision of interdisciplinarity is not wholly paranoid. There is a danger that the game of sending people home to form new departments on the university level would really be a game of musical chairs and that, when the music stops, the humanities would be left standing. Generic units of literature or humanities professors, without a coherent canon of knowledge or a rationale for necessary research fields, might encourage the attitude that humanities programs are centers of service rather than research centers, and increase the tendency to hire lecturers or adjuncts rather than research professors.

This is where academic leadership makes a difference. We need to explain why the arts and humanities matter, why they are at the core of a liberal education, providing the context for all disciplines. The digital arts, digital media, and digital humanities are exciting and vital today, but the arts and humanities are not relevant only insofar as they relate to technology. As we enter a world of difference in the global society taking shape around us, what can be more important to our understanding of the stories that we tell about others and ourselves than history, religion, language, art, and culture? If the university of the future does not have a central place for the humanities, and for the principles of the liberal education that the humanities embody in both research and teaching, then the university will be impoverished along with the humanities.

For the humanities to have a place, however, faculty, faculty committees, department chairs, deans, and learned societies need to worry about the places in which the humanities conduct and organize their research and teaching, and that means thinking about bureaucracy. Thinking about bureaucracy, thinking through bureaucracy, means designing new maps rather than defending territory. If we ignore bureaucracy, we will risk leaving the humanities vulnerable to the sort of academic redistricting that will leave us without a territory to defend. We need an overlay of maps that design and define the overlapping intellectual communities in which teaching and research take place and new forms of collaboration develop. These are the maps that will help students, colleagues, academic leaders, and the public understand that all roads lead to the humanities.
IN THE FACE of rising global competition and the heightened call for accountability issued by the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education, educators across the country are being called upon—once again—to demonstrate the validity of a liberal education. We are asked repeatedly if our approach to undergraduate education will prepare students to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, if it is capable of adapting to rapidly changing times. As we seek to respond to these concerns and evaluate the effectiveness of our own institutions, I suggest that we look for guidance to those enlightened revolutionaries who established not only our democracy, but also an American approach to liberal education that was distinctive for its emphasis on pragmatism delivered through an integrated, comprehensive student experience.

Our founding fathers instinctively understood that a nation whose success depended upon engaged and informed citizens demanded an education far different from the isolated, “monkish,” ivory-tower model that was prevalent throughout eighteenth-century Europe and upon which America’s colonial, theologically oriented colleges and universities had been modeled. They advocated, instead, an education that easily traversed the boundaries between the classroom and the community, an education in which the lessons of the academy could be applied immediately to a society seeking to define its own parameters. It was a revolutionary education for a revolutionary time.

Benjamin Rush
One of the most passionate and eloquent advocates of a distinctive American education was Dr. Benjamin Rush, who founded Dickinson College. Rush’s fundamental precepts, debated regularly with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, John Dickinson, and others, offer us important directives as we explore ways to define the relevance and value of liberal education in our own rapidly changing, revolutionary era.

For Rush, an American liberal arts education was to be, above all, useful—useful to oneself, but also to society. This education was to accomplish nothing less than preparation of those citizens and leaders who would shape the economy, government, and social structures of the young democracy. Rush adamantly believed that students must be engaged with their society in order to prepare them to lead in it. Rush had no tolerance for “the college high on the hill,” physically and symbolically removed from the people. For this reason, he strategically located Dickinson College a short two-block walk from the county courthouse, fully expecting students to make the trek on a regular basis to observe government in action. Through the creation of debating societies—an early incarnation of extracurricular student groups—Rush sought to give students the opportunity to discuss the most pressing issues of the day, an opportunity that connected them to rather than isolated them from emerging national developments. Rush even went so far as to recommend that students live not on campus, but with families in the town, where they could be mentored daily in community values and citizenship.

Rush’s conception of an American liberal arts education did not draw arbitrary boundaries among students’ classroom experiences,
their extracurricular and recreational activities, and their living arrangements. It was an educational approach designed to encourage character development and one that valued public service as a form of patriotism.

We have, I am afraid, lost this vision of an integrated and distinctively American approach to liberal education. We have compartmentalized its parts. There has been a rupture between the student life and academic sides of our enterprise and a focused emphasis on the “useful” and the comprehensive has dulled with time.

While Rush’s idea of having all students live with families in the community is unrealistic in the twenty-first century, is the fundamental premise behind this idea outdated? Shouldn’t we still be striving to provide daily mentoring to our students in community values and citizenship? Isn’t it our responsibility to develop the twenty-first-century contexts that accomplish this most basic and most important of goals? And should not the current “accountability movement” in higher education extend beyond the measurement of disciplinary academic ability to that of citizenship? Shouldn’t we be seeking evidence of informed voting in public elections, community volunteerism, monetary contributions to nonprofit organizations, standing for public office?

**Decoupling academic and student life**

I would argue that higher education has derailed on both the academic and student life sides. Of course, the academic side would like to claim that it has held steadfast to its mission, and faculty all too frequently place blame on student life for failing to make these important connections. This line of thinking, however, ignores the fact that student life divisions are a relatively recent creation in American higher education and that faculty should also, as they have in the past, shoulder the responsibility of providing a comprehensive educational experience for our students.

And what about student life? This division has burgeoned at most institutions over the past two decades, but in too many instances, we have allowed it to mushroom without clear purpose or direction. Instead, we have reacted helter-skelter in our rush to meet rising student demands and challenges. We are “over-offering” and thus introducing a hyper-consumerism into the academic setting. We have built twenty-four-hour student unions and fitness centers that resemble cruise ships. In our haste to demonstrate that we understand that engaged students are healthy, energetic students, we have scrambled to provide them with opportunities to engage in, well, everything—to include every conceivable aspect of their own selves and their unfettered desires.

We have not, however, organized this plethora of activities into a cohesive or progressive series of meaningful, educative experiences. Instead, we have provided our students with a shopping mall of choices without an overarching purpose. In the process, we have created a lot of busy, busy students, many of whom are intent on adding activity upon activity to their undergraduate resumes. We have, in short, succeeded in giving students the opportunity to be busy—but simply being busy is not the same as being meaningfully engaged with society and understanding the connection between the activities in which one is engaged and the larger educational mission of the institution.

In general, we have not fulfilled our educative responsibility to open students’ minds, to encourage serious inquiry, and to develop an understanding of what it means to be a part of a wider, diverse community that is not always cast ultimately in a student’s own image. By simply enabling our students’ selfish desires, we have denied them the genuine sociability and connectivity necessary for continuous learning. Instead, we have fallen prey to the students’ own definition of success as we assist them in their quest for personal advancement at the expense of communal progress. The whole notion of a “useful” education, in other words, has become focused on a personal usefulness as each student asks him or herself, “How can I get ahead?”

The type of “usefulness” that builds good citizens through service to society has all too frequently fallen by the wayside. While there is a notable rise in community service or volunteerism among college students today, this often

**We must ensure that our students are prepared and willing to take on the responsibility of global citizenship and to shake free of their obsessive focus on themselves**
occurs because such activity is now viewed as a necessary component for “credentialing” personal aspirations. Of course, there are notable exceptions to these negative trends among both individual students and college or university programs. Yet, in general, it is this decoupling of the academic from student life and our enabling behavior in higher education that has resulted in today’s undergraduates experiencing what former Harvard dean Harry Lewis (2006) describes provocatively in his recent book, *Excellence Without a Soul*, as “the hollowness of undergraduate education,” the total abdication of colleges’ “moral authority to shape the souls of students,” and the absence of any definitive statements about what it means to be an educated person.

**American undergraduate education for the twenty-first century**

It is time to reclaim and revitalize for the twenty-first century the distinctiveness that characterized American higher education during the earliest days of our democracy. At the dawn of a century that promises to be breathtaking in both its challenges and opportunities, we must ensure that our students are prepared and willing to take on the responsibility of global citizenship and to shake free of their obsessive focus on themselves. We must ensure that they know how the United States “works” and what it values (in all that complexity) and are prepared to engage and listen carefully to opinions expressed by the rest of the world. We must be willing to admit that we have lost the connection between theory and practice that will most readily make this global understanding possible, and we must seek to redefine this connection in a twenty-first-century context.

To do so, we must return to a conception of undergraduate education that is comprehensive and does not compartmentalize students’ experiences into artificial components that separate the curricular from the extracurricular. We must return to the notion of a “useful” education that encompasses and intertwines personal and public usefulness, demonstrating to our students that personal success and understanding are most complete when they contribute to the public good—not when they simply fulfill individual notions of anticipated accomplishment. This will require us to rethink totally our approach to undergraduate
education. Dr. Rush was on to this notion very early. In a 1773 letter to his countrymen on patriotism, he stated that “the social spirit is the true selfish spirit, and men always promote their own interest most in proportion as they promote that of their neighbors and their country” (1951, 84).

As a starting point, we must conceive of and treat student life and the academic program as coequal partners in a shared endeavor that begins as a student prepares for the transition to college and continues as an organized and sustained priority until commencement. The residential experience continues to be the characteristic that distinguishes American undergraduate education from that found in other countries, and it should remain a centrally defining feature. The challenge is to incorporate it into the entire educational experience rather than treating it as an ancillary, less serious partner. Failure to do so places the historic advantage of an American higher education at risk and lends increasing advantage to the many for-profit institutions that offer a new—and far less costly—business model for higher education that eschews athletics, residential life, and student life for the bottom line.

We must find ways to encourage faculty to think differently about how they reach and relate to students, ways that will require them to think beyond the classroom experience. The answer is not, as some have suggested, merely to coax faculty into living in residence halls, a concept that presumes that physical juxtaposition will establish a cohesive educational experience. Rather, we need to think creatively about how to bridge the artificial chasm between academic and student life. We need to focus on ways to engage students in a seamless experience that moves easily and naturally in and out of the classroom—an experience that involves faculty in both arenas.

We all have been touched and inspired by a professor whose passion for his or her discipline is absolutely contagious. We need to enhance and expand the ways in which our faculty can model behavior that shows students what it is like to be an engaged scholar who is connected to the wider world with a sense of wonder, bliss, and obligation. Equally important, we need to give our students glimpses of faculty interactions in their own communities. They must see the “whole” professor—an individual who lives beyond his or her discipline with curiosity and a commitment to better the world. We need, in other words, to illustrate to our students through example—through proactive mentorship—that a liberal education is a lifelong habit of the mind.

Similarly, we must demand for our institutions student life professionals who push beyond attention to the affective and endlessly affirming desires of our students. We must ask them to act as far stronger role models by advancing discourse about issues that matter beyond the highly circumscribed topic of the self and how it “feels at a particular moment.” We mustask them to encourage students’ engagement in an expansive interpretation of the life of the mind and to advance a more realistic commentary—a constructive honesty—about students’ performance and aspiration that tempers their unfettered, often ungrounded self-assessment. We must ask them to do so with a candor not found in education—collegiate or precollegiate—for decades. We need, in the final analysis, to push beyond the ivory-tower mentality that our founding fathers so ardently rejected for American higher education but that, nevertheless, has seeped steadily back into the mindset of most of our country’s colleges and universities.

In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that all sectors of American life, except liberal arts higher education, revolted against the practices of royalist, privileged England. “Learning for learning’s sake,” instead of the objective of an ultimately useful study, still dominates American liberal education all too often. It is now time to complete the revolution.

Introducing a more comprehensive and generous approach to undergraduate education will require nothing short of a major cultural shift for many institutions. Developing the synergy between the academic program and student life will require that long-established habits be replaced with creative thinking and a willingness for change—a most formidable challenge in a profession notorious for maintaining stability and status quo in its basic organization and intent.
Perhaps most important will be the need to reassess the purposes for which we reward our faculty—an exercise that will ask us to reexamine the most fundamental aspects of our mission. We must encourage our faculty to connect to the world beyond our campus boundaries through activities such as service learning and applied research. We must find or reallocate resources to help faculty establish networks with the broader community. We must challenge faculty to broaden the definition and scope of substantive scholarship in a liberal arts setting, and we must support them as they explore new pedagogies and introduce new methods of research in and out of the classroom.

We must recognize that these activities can and should be the foundation for legitimate, serious scholarship and service for faculty and that they are integral to advancing a distinctively engaging residential life for students. And we must give these activities appropriate weight and merit when evaluating faculty performance. In the final analysis, we will only be successful if we create a solid scholarly foundation of new knowledge, pedagogy, and residential life out of this renewed synthesis that will define American higher education for the twenty-first century.

To the casual observer, all of this talk about citizenship and engagement with community may seem superfluous and unnecessary. Look in virtually any college catalogue or on any Web site and you will find platitudes and promises touting the institution's commitment to these ideals. While I suppose the fact that such pronouncements exist is a step in the right direction, many of us know that the real work has yet to be done. To quote Thomas Jefferson, “it is in our lives and not from our words, that [our value] must be read…. By the same test, the world must judge me.” There you have it. By the same test, so must the world judge us in higher education. This is true accountability—devotion to and deliverance upon the original post-Revolutionary intention adapted to our own rapidly changing times.

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DEVELOPING THE ABILITY to make, recognize, and evaluate connections among disparate concepts, fields, or contexts is what integrative learning is all about. Breadth and depth of learning remain hallmarks of a quality liberal education. Yet, today, there’s a growing consensus that breadth and depth are not enough.

As Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), argues, educators are taking seriously the fragmentation of knowledge, not just in [their] courses, but through the knowledge explosion in the world around us. Many of the most interesting educational innovations clearly are intended to teach students what we might call the new liberal art of integration. Not only do these innovations invite students to integrate learning from different sources, but they also provide models, frameworks, and practice in actually doing so. (2004, 7)

To be sure, there’s a sense in which all learning is integrative, if only because new ideas must somehow connect to prior ones. When educators single out integrative learning for special attention, however, they are usually talking about larger leaps of imagination—about linking ideas and domains that are not easily or typically connected. As a student in a mathematics and English learning community at the College of San Mateo observed, integrative learning means “tying things together that don’t seem obvious.”

How to help students tie things together is the challenge. Most theories of intellectual development construe the ability to integrate knowledge as a relatively sophisticated skill, which develops over time and requires considerable effort and experience to attain. For example, Benjamin Bloom (1956) placed synthesis near the “top” of his Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, and William Perry (1998) thought that the capacity for synthesis develops as students progress through varieties of dualism (in which knowledge is basically right or wrong) and relativism (in which a number of legitimate ways of seeing the world are recognized) to arrive, if they do, at commitment in the face of uncertainty. Details of particular typologies aside, it appears that students need multiple opportunities to understand and to practice the “integrative arts” throughout their college years.

Strengthening integrative learning, then, involves broad-based campus change. Although the integrative arts can (and should) be taught within particular courses, departments, and institutional divisions, they cannot by their very nature be pursued alone. The most promising initiatives for integrative learning are about finding strategic points of connection, threading attention to integrative learning throughout (and between) an institution’s various programs, and encouraging and scaffolding students’ own efforts to connect the parts.

Fostering integrative learning
Fortunately, the higher education community is gaining significant experience in fostering integrative learning through changes in curricula, pedagogy, assessment, and faculty development. Consider, if you will, the experience of the institutions that participated in the national Integrative Learning Project (ILP), sponsored by AAC&U and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Designed at promoting integrative learning in undergraduate education, this three-year project worked with ten campuses to develop and assess advanced models and strategies to foster students’ abilities to integrate their learning over time. We reported extensively on work in progress in Peer Review (summer/fall 2005), and have now had time to step back and reflect on the work campus by campus and across settings in our online public report (www.carnegiefoundation.org/e-library/integrativelearning).
Integrative Learning

University of California, Santa Barbara
Curriculum. The curriculum is an obvious starting point for questions about opportunities for synthesis: Where and when are students asked to put the pieces together in order to better understand or solve important problems? Where and when are students encouraged to make links among their academic, personal, and community lives? To be sure, many students already get opportunities for synthesis in some of their courses, and in “enriching educational experiences” (see the National Survey of Student Engagement) such as community service or volunteer work, lively interdisciplinary programs and centers, or those honors programs and learning communities that are accompanied by special attention to academic advising, cocurricular activities, and other student services.

While these kinds of courses, enrichment experiences, and special programs increase the chance that students will receive encouragement and guidance for integrative learning, many colleges and universities are trying to be more intentional about building links into the regular curriculum and creating opportunities for all students to integrate their learning at multiple points throughout their college careers. For example, ILP campuses have focused energy on key areas for curriculum integration. These include extended core curricula; cross-disciplinary learning communities; cross-cutting skills, literacies, and learning outcomes; first-year initiatives; middle-year initiatives; efforts to connect professional programs with general education; and efforts to connect study abroad programs with curricula.

Pedagogy. In the drive to help students develop integrative habits of mind, it is important to remember that the effectiveness of curricular innovations depends on the pedagogies that support them. Many familiar pedagogies can serve the goal of integrative learning. Indeed, just about any format that allows groups of students to turn their attention to common problems, issues, themes, or tasks—the seminar, for example—can prompt integrative learning, if the topic is of sufficient scope and interest to be elucidated by insights from different disciplines and perspectives. Experiential strategies, like service learning, study abroad, or internships, invite students to make connections between coursework and community, theory and practice. Innovative approaches using new media can relate objects or texts to contexts, and enable creative simulations. And there are emergent pedagogies, which respond to unanticipated events (like 9/11), student interests, and other concerns.

All of these pedagogies share certain qualities. They acknowledge the realities of a changing world where disciplinary and curricular isolation are neither feasible nor desirable. They require (and develop) intellectual dexterity on the part of both the teacher and the student, as well as the ability to speak to, if not from, a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience. They also embrace a commitment to creating time and space for dialogue and conflict. As a result, these pedagogies necessitate a more flexible approach to assessment, with well-designed assignments throughout the course, and multiple opportunities for structured reflection to help students take a more intentional approach to their own learning.

Several ILP campuses are experimenting with the use of electronic portfolios as a way for students to integrate their own learning, and two (La Guardia and Portland State) have been national leaders in the e-portfolio movement.

What is needed in teaching for integration, above any particular pedagogy, is an intentional approach. This means, first, designing courses with integrative learning in mind, and second, asking questions and gathering evidence about the specific challenges and dilemmas that students are facing as they develop their capacities as integrative learners. (See, for example, reports by the 2005 cohort of Carnegie Scholars in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.)
But it also requires paying close attention—as the ILP campuses are doing—to integrative learning when taking up issues of curricular alignment, program and campus-level assessment, and faculty development. If integrative learning is only as good as the pedagogy that supports it, then integrative teaching will only be as successful as the arrangements that make it possible and make it work.

**Assessment.** Assessment is a particular challenge for integrative learning—as it is, we might add, for other liberal education goals. Although assessment practices in higher education have advanced over the past two decades, neither standardized tests (such as ACT’s Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency or ETS’s Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress) nor surveys of student opinion (like the National Survey of Student Engagement) directly assess students’ integrative work. While some of the exercises used for the Collegiate Learning Assessment (a standardized qualitative exam) may require integrative action, the test provides scores only for critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication.

ILP participants have, over the past several years, developed a collection of innovative practices to assess—and foster—integrative learning. Given that integrative learning can be defined in a wide variety of ways, it is no surprise that these locally invented assignments and assessments vary according to each campus’s learning needs. One prime advantage of locally developed assignments and assessments is the enhanced likelihood that teaching and instruction will be aligned intentionally to produce quality learning and that the assessments will have good validity.

Valid assessment can arise from careful consideration of the whole planning-teaching-learning-assessment feedback cycle. Validity depends upon asking students to complete a task very similar to the experiences they had leading up to the assessment. Those experiences most often are class assignments. Assignments should logically flow from the goals set for student learning and allow sufficient time and opportunity to learn. Goals depend upon the definition of the outcome: complex outcomes such as integrative learning, while often difficult to define in words, can also be defined operationally—that is, by what one does when engaged in the outcome. So, by this logic, an assignment can represent nearly all of the learning cycle—operationally defining the outcome, advancing learning toward goals established for the outcome, producing material for formative and summative assessment, and generating data to improve future teaching and learning. Indeed, because assignments can and should be seen as a powerful (if underappreciated) kind of assessment, the ten ILP campuses have begun to see assignment design as an especially promising site for work by faculty, departments, and programs concerned with integrative learning.

**Faculty Development.** With so much riding on pedagogy and classroom-based assessment, campuses seriously committed to integrative learning are putting in place not only relevant experiences for students, but also opportunities for faculty to develop the capacity for—and a community around—integrative teaching. Indeed, there are already many routes to this end. On a growing number of campuses, centers for teaching and learning offer workshops on classroom approaches that promote connection making, such as collaborative learning, problem-based learning, service learning, and the like. But serious commitment to integrative learning for students requires something that goes beyond what is usually meant by faculty development, and involves efforts to create a campus culture where a larger part of the academic community (faculty, staff, and students) are engaged in common integrative work.

Opportunities for faculty to develop more integrative approaches can be found in work on curriculum. On many campuses, general education reform brings the community together for tough but powerful conversations about the goals of undergraduate education and how students’ experiences should (but often do not) add up. Working together on key moments of the curriculum (for example, freshman year at the College of San Mateo) provides more focused opportunities for goal setting and design, while convening people to consider the effects of the curriculum can provide valuable occasions to examine student work (for example, examining sophomore
writing portfolios at Carleton College). Special efforts, like the State University of New York College at Oswego’s Catalyst Project, which explores students’ perceptions of learning from freshman orientation to senior year, can also provide grist for lively discussion among faculty about how students integrate their experiences over time and what new interventions could strengthen those experiences.

Of course, integration is not simply a matter of capacity. One may have the skills and know-how to connect ideas but not the inclination. In this sense, integration is also a matter of culture and values, and both students and faculty are more likely to embrace integrative thinking if the campus is a place where one finds a lively exchange about big ideas and issues that people care about—topics that call on people to contribute different perspectives and bring their varied expertise and experience to bear in ways that create new understandings.

**Lessons for leadership**

As the participants in the Integrative Learning Project can attest, a great deal can happen (and fail to happen) in three years. On the one hand, three years feels scarcely long enough to identify leadership and establish the momentum necessary for lasting change. On the other hand, three years is more than sufficient to encounter the full array of obstacles to campus change: departure of key faculty, shifting administrative priorities, or declining funds, to mention just a few.

In light of these stubborn facts, what lessons can we draw about leading campus change? How can we best make sense of the complex relationships between intention, practice, and result that played out on each of the ten participating campuses as they worked to create more and better opportunities for students to put together the various pieces of their undergraduate experience?

**Make integrative learning a campus-wide concern.** Individual faculty members can do much to strengthen integrative learning through decisions about course design, pedagogy, and assignments. But individual efforts, by themselves, cannot create and sustain the opportunities students need to develop as integrative thinkers over the full arc of their college careers. For this to happen, collaborative efforts at the campus, program, and departmental levels are needed, both to introduce new practices where necessary, and to ensure that programs already in place reinforce and build on one another. It may be necessary to start with a small group of colleagues in a relatively modest way, while keeping one’s eyes open for larger opportunities. Articulating a vision that connects integrative learning to important institutional goals can attract people from different walks of campus life and can help a campus obtain “buy-in,” create alliances, and marshal resources for successful initiatives.

**Design initiatives strategically.** There are many ways to strengthen the integrative potential of the undergraduate experience, from approaches that focus on the structure of the curriculum to those that give students the tools to connect their academic learning with their lives. Which ones make the most sense for any particular institution depends on what is already happening there, as well as on the strength of campus commitment to integrative learning as an educational goal. Finding out where and when integrative learning is (and is not) currently taking place can help identify strategic sites for new initiatives, reveal points of overlap to nurture, and discover gaps to fill. Examining successful work in these areas at your own or another institution can provide “existence proofs” and design principles for your own initiatives.

**ABOUT THE PROJECT**

Through the Integrative Learning Project: Opportunities to Connect, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Association of American Colleges and Universities worked with the following campuses to develop and assess advanced models and strategies to help students pursue learning in more intentional, connected ways:

- Carleton College
- College of San Mateo
- LaGuardia Community College CUNY
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Michigan State University
- Philadelphia University
- Portland State University
- Salve Regina University
- State University of New York College at Oswego
- University of Charleston

Additional information is available online at www.aacu.org/integrative_learning. The project’s public report is available online at www.carnegiefoundation.org/elibrary/integrativelearning.
Support faculty creatively. Most educators are intrigued by the concept of integrative learning but have different ideas about what integrative learning means, how it develops, and what it looks like in practice. Establishing more and better occasions to talk about integrative learning can help educators develop a more widely shared understanding about its nature, varieties, and value, and about how, when, and where it can best be fostered. Such discussions can be particularly productive when grounded in a common text or project that involves analyzing actual student work. But there should also be a sustained, connected set of faculty development experiences to build the necessary level of skills, commitment, and community. Faculty should, of course, be recognized and rewarded for this work.

Make a commitment to knowledge building. Integrative learning initiatives should be accompanied by a commitment to inquiry that can first build knowledge about the depth of student learning that results (or does not) from participation in integrative opportunities, and then suggest what aspects of the curriculum, cocurriculum, course design, and pedagogy foster and improve students’ capacities for integration. This means asking interesting and important questions at each site where reform takes place; gathering and exploring evidence; trying out and refining the new insights that have been gained from this process; and finding ways to make results public so that they can inform and inspire further work. Keep in mind that when assessment instruments, such as assignments or surveys, are well designed, they can serve as pedagogical tools as well.

Recognize that institutionalization is a long-term process. Strengthening integrative learning on campus is a long-term process, that requires leadership, creativity, and flexibility on the part of everyone involved. To sustain the work, leaders should think of themselves as teachers, working with others to transform their understandings, their commitments, their beliefs, and their skepticism. It is important to create opportunities for people new to the initiative to get involved. And, to maintain momentum, it helps to focus on the goal—integrative learning—rather than the parameters of any particular initiative. If one design runs up against bureaucratic, political, or financial roadblocks, it may be possible to create new ones that skirt the problems, while allowing time for a solution to be found.

Build networks beyond campus for collaboration and exchange. An important lesson from the Integrative Learning Project is that campus efforts are strengthened by working with other campuses, sharing discoveries about integrative learning, developing new ideas about assessment, and learning from each other’s designs. Local efforts can be reinvigorated through participation in a community of educators working toward similar goals, and that community, in turn, can contribute to building knowledge that can inform efforts to foster integrative learning at other colleges and universities. Securing support from external donors and associations can bring resources and recognition that can enhance the status and visibility of integrative learning initiatives on campus.

Prospects

This is a promising moment for advocates of integrative learning. With all six regional and four major specialized accreditors calling for some form of integrative learning as an outcome of college, what has long been an aspiration for undergraduate education is now a common expectation. Campuses are discussing not whether integrative learning will be part of undergraduate learning, but rather how it will be defined, fostered, supported, and assessed. It is our hope that institutions will find models, tools, object lessons, and inspiration from participants in the Integrative Learning Project. But their work is not over. Like everyone else, individuals on these campuses plan to continue to enlarge and strengthen opportunities for integrative learning in the years ahead, and continue to welcome the company of fellow travelers along the way.

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Connecting Cocurricular Service

A Movement toward Civic Engagement

WAYNE MEISEL

Since I was a college student some thirty years ago, my activism has evolved from volunteering to community service, and from service learning to community-based research. Over the years, those of us involved in this work have experimented with new ideas and have hoisted banners with different terms, all meant in their day to suggest that we would indeed get it right this time—and all inevitably criticized and replaced for not going far enough. “Civic engagement” is the term we currently use to express the promise of a bold and hopeful vision for significant action that can create meaningful change. Conceptually, civic engagement integrates community service and social justice, as well as local engagement and global awareness. It compels us to be literate about public policy and to participate actively in the political process.

In partnership with the Bonner Foundation, seventy-five college and university campuses across the country are working to build and sustain students’ four-year involvement in civic engagement. These institutions have demonstrated innovation and excellence in this area, as well as a commitment to press forward on their own campuses and to partner with other institutions. In addition, these institutions have established service-based scholarships as part of their relationship with the Bonner Foundation. Thus, all campuses in the Bonner program have a core group of students committed to significant, ongoing involvement in community issues and to engaging other students to join them in such endeavors.

Beginning in 2003, a core group of campuses—the University of California–Los Angeles, Washington and Lee University, Mars Hill College, and the College of New Jersey—began work on the Civic Education Academic Certificate program, sponsored in part by the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. After nearly two years, another dozen colleges and universities—all involved with the Bonner Foundation’s service scholarship—were chosen through a competitive selection process. The diversity of these institutions was inspiring, with participants ranging from the University of Alaska Anchorage to Morehouse College. All of the colleges and universities participating in the Bonner program will implement some form of civic engagement academic journey, and it is our hope that all of higher education will be challenged by the work we have done so far.

Backdrop of service, learning, and engagement

In higher education today, most service is performed as a cocurricular activity. The result is a student development model with little attention either to age-appropriate service or to building a campus-wide culture of service and an infrastructure to maintain it. By contrast, the Bonner program developed “Service as Transformation,” a student development model based on rising levels of expectation. This model for cocurricular activity has enabled us to send the clear message to students, administrators, and community leaders that service is not about the individual student, the campus service program, or the community alone; instead, service is about all three, at the same time and in equal measure.

There are challenges to implementing this student development model. There has not been much momentum to embrace the rising levels of expectation, which require students to undertake serious engagement both on the campus and in the community. Higher education leaders still tout the number of hours served or the percentage of students who participate without regard to the quality of service or the level of discovery and learning.
The other challenge we have faced concerns the great divide between the academic work of higher education and the cocurricular activities of student life. As students become more deeply involved, the administrators of our programs find it necessary to reflect upon, discuss, and educate students about the issues they encounter and the problems they face. Campus administrators often feel compelled to engage students deeply through reading and writing. Yet, given the nature of higher education and the academic demands placed on many of these students, there is a reaction against including more academic rigor in a cocurricular setting.

Students are participating in courses that include service learning and community-based research as part of the course work. The impact of these academic experiences is often transformative for all involved: students discover a way to connect their intellect with the world outside the school; faculty encounter students who are passionate and engaged in the discipline; and community agencies receive expertise and products that they might not be able to afford and that
strengthen the capacity of their infrastructures. Yet, too often, these courses come and go with the academic calendar, and the level of engagement waxes and wanes significantly.

**The civic engagement academic certificate**

Having already gone quite far with a community service-based cocurricular model that offered students the chance to engage in service for their entire time in school, we wanted next to create an integrated path on the academic side of things. That is, we sought to create an academic parallel to the predominantly cocurricular service activity.

We recognized that many students are already overstressed because of academic, work, and social demands. They find it difficult to take additional courses because of the time, costs, and existing requirements for majors and graduation. Moreover, curriculum change takes time and energy and occurs slowly. And it is expensive to create even a small number of new courses.

In response to these challenges, our design incorporated financial and other forms of student support—service-based scholarships, community-based federal work-study funds, and AmeriCorps Education Awards. And instead of requiring students to take additional courses, the certificate program allows them to take courses within the curriculum, and even within the majors, that touch on issues that connect to their service work. Indeed, throughout the curriculum at all of our schools, we found academic inquiry that connected to the civic engagement ideal.

While the language we have come to use is not universally accepted, and the construct is not followed by all participants, both are meant to suggest a pattern—or what we call an “academic journey”—that parallels the cocurricular student development model, which has a beginning, middle, and end. The academic journey connects service and learning without relying on a forced service-learning pedagogy, and it
draws upon faculty commitment to teaching and research. We began with the idea of a certificate to suggest something less focused and stringent than a minor. Yet the culture and practice of individual institutions led some to use the construct of the minor to frame the work we were doing. Regardless of the designation, the academic journey begins with a lead-in course and ends with a capstone designed to bring closure to the experience as well as to point the students in a particular direction after they graduate.

A design for civic engagement
The academic journey is both focused and flexible. Participating institutions studied their own curricula, made adjustments, and moved forward by establishing a formal academic path. The certificate program includes the following elements:

- **A lead-in course**: Many schools have a lead-in or gateway course as part of the first-year experience. This can take the form of freshmen seminars, learning communities, or first-year orientation courses. Within the broad parameters of such courses, there is an opportunity to include readings, writings, and discussions about service and justice.

- **Exposure to domestic poverty**: Most schools, if not all, have within their existing curriculum courses that expose students to issues of domestic poverty. These courses are found in any number of disciplines, but most frequently in U.S. history, sociology, political science, public policy, and literature.

- **International exposure**: Many different academic disciplines and multidisciplinary courses introduce students to and require thoughtful analysis of international affairs. In these courses, students are required to integrate the service experiences with international issues.

- **A service-learning course**: Over the last fifteen years, there has been an explosion of service-learning courses across the curriculum. Students pursuing a certificate are required to take a service-learning course in their academic major field of study, where such courses are offered. Where no such courses are offered, students are required to take a service-learning course from a different discipline. When possible, students are encouraged to take a minimum of two courses with significant service-learning components—one course in the academic major, and one outside it.

- **A full-time service internship**: A full-time service activity is required to complete the civic engagement certificate. This service may be completed for credit through an internship program; if the service is not credit-bearing it may still require a certain level of preparation, reflection, and writing. Students can serve at either domestic or international service sites. Placements should expose students to poverty, cultural diversity, and public policy.

- **A senior capstone**: A cornerstone of the civic engagement certificate and the service-based scholarship is a final presentation of service and learning that comes near the end of the student’s college or university experience. Students engage in an intense and demanding service placement that integrates academic work. This senior service capstone may take place as part of a senior seminar, an independent study, or community-based research.

Participants in the Bonner program have identified several elements that are vital to civic engagement work. We call these “pillars” to indicate their prominence, and we divide them into two distinct categories. The “pillars of content” are essential areas of focus for any community-service or civic engagement initiative. The “pillars of design” are elements of program design that are required in order to move standard for accomplishment to a higher level.
**Pillars of content**

For too long, we have congratulated ourselves simply for sending students out into the community or for taking them on a weeklong trip that requires a passport. But students must know the world they are to enter, and they certainly must know the communities they are to serve. We cannot do service well if we do not understand the reality of poverty and explore its causes (and potential solutions). Therefore, we have established it as a new standard that students encounter issues of poverty in the classroom before and during their outreach to the community. This focus on poverty is the first pillar of content, and there are many ways to address it within an academic setting—whether it is through literature, history, political science, or chemistry.

When I was a college student, there were two ways to get involved in the world: community service and political action. In the service world, students were told to do service but to keep out of politics; politics was not volunteering. Not anymore. We believe that good community service makes good politics, and that good politics affect the service we need to do. We embrace a comprehensive approach to civic engagement informed by the key indicators identified by the University of Maryland Center for Information and Research about Civic Learning and Engagement (see www.civicyouth.org). The bottom line is that if you care about the people you serve, you will study, engage, and participate in the political process. If you don’t make the connection to politics in your service, you are not serving well. This connection to politics is the second pillar of content.

Recently, I was asked to travel to France and speak at the Council of Europe. Understanding that I would face educators and leaders from around the world, many of whom were hostile to America, I wondered how to talk about the service work that we do. If I merely talked about the hours of service we did, or the percentage of students who said they did service—indicators we use regularly in the States—I would not be able to tell a story of value. We may be mentoring a child, but do students know what is happening in the Sudan, Cambodia, Venezuela, and North Korea? We know that most do not. We often use the slogan “think globally, act locally,” but today we are compelled to think globally and act globally as well. Accordingly, engagement in the world is the third pillar of content. We are compelled to understand the impact of our service and to consider how it might improve the lives of people halfway around the world—not just in the neighborhood that borders campus.

There are many ways to learn about and engage in the world. The most common is to participate in a semester abroad program or short-term service trips. The Bonner program encourages more of the same. However, we also encourage students to participate in study abroad programs that are oriented toward issues of poverty and politics and that connect the service and learning that goes on “over there” with the civic engagement students begin and return to “over here.” We recommend that short-term service trips be extended from seven or ten days to twenty or thirty days, because the opportunities to learn, build relationships, perform service work, and deepen understanding increase with longer stays. Furthermore, we look to engage and develop long-term partnerships with agencies and individuals who work with immigrant and other cultural organizations in this country. In America, you don’t need to get on a plane to have an international experience.

**Pillars of design**

From the first gathering of participants in the Bonner program, we have shared stories about ourselves and our life’s work. Everyone has been fully engaged in extensive programs through which students make meaningful commitments. The one word that describes our activities is “intense.” There is nothing...
random or light or simple about the work we do. This *intensity of experience* is the first pillar of design. In the Bonner program, students are expected, at a minimum, to serve in the community ten hours per week for the entire time they are in college. This may seem like a lot—and it is. Some even consider it excessive, until they realize that students make similar commitments all the time—whether to sports, the student newspaper, the performing arts, or student life. This commitment of hours contrasts with the dabbling that often goes on in the many programs that create a setting of volunteer tourism, where participants see without understanding and act without feeling.

The service performed outside of the classroom must line up with the education received in the classroom. This *integration of the two curricula*—the second pillar of design—may sound simple, but it is perhaps the single most difficult part of this work. The idea for the Bonner program grew out of the failure and fatigue of good people who led service initiatives and who understood the need for quality education, reflection, and discussion. Ask even the most committed student to read and write more in a cocurricular setting and you will have mutiny or fallout. Yet every school has courses already in the curriculum that engage students with poverty, politics, and global issues. What we have done, and what we are encouraging schools to do, is to be intentional in identifying, lifting up, and connecting the things we learn in the classroom with the actions we take in the world. We recognize that, to achieve integration, it is not necessary to build a service component into every academic course. For example, in order to participate in a summer service internship, students at Washington and Lee University take a course in poverty during the spring semester; they are then encouraged to take a follow-up course during the fall semester. Neither course has a service requirement, but both inform students’ service by providing grounding in the theoretical, philosophical, and political dimensions of poverty.

The design of our service work is based on the academic calendar. Every semester, students’ lives begin anew and their schedules change. As a result, much of the service activity conforms to the quarter or semester system. When the course schedule changes, the service changes or, in many cases, ceases because of conflicts and new demands. Directly addressing this reality is one of the major challenges we face. Our strategies for engagement have to transcend the academic calendar to include a multiyear engagement. When we start and stop our service engagement according to the academic calendar, we revert to dabbling and volunteer tourism. What we need is a multiyear approach that acknowledges the school calendar but is not limited by it. Such a multiyear approach would focus the academic journey on forms of civic engagement that parallel and intersect with the service and the study that students do on a daily basis. This *multiyear, sequential, developmental approach* is the third pillar of design.

**Conclusion**

I constantly reflect on the difference between my work in the mid-1980s as a young advocate for more volunteering and the work I do as a foundation director building a program to expand and sustain civic engagement. The motivations and the actions don’t feel all that different. But what is different is where the windows of opportunity are and how hard we can push. What gives me a sense of accomplishment and hope is that, unlike twenty years ago, we can claim a genuine relationship between service and social justice. We have transformed the divide between service and academic inquiry that informs our citizenship; we are able not just to think globally but also to act globally; and we are now required to connect the service we do with the political structures that shape and govern our society.
When I started writing my blog, University Diaries, three years ago, there was a lot I didn’t know about Web page technology: how to change a template, how to insert a link, how to delete comments. As I settled in to my online chronicle of university life, I learned these tasks pretty quickly. What took me longer to grasp about the Internet was the nature of the thing—its speed and reach, the way the connected world can grab a story and, in a matter of hours, gigantify it.

This is a much more dramatic intensification effect than traditional newspapers were able to achieve. It’s instantaneous, global, and subject to international commentary and analysis. Millions of Web surfers, interested in a story, will click not merely through Google News, the New York Times online, and other mainstream sources. They will go to the blogs, where anyone can chime in; and they will go to that restlessly moving creature, Wikipedia, which often has the very latest on controversial people and events. They will forward stories to friends, and their friends will send them something back that they hadn’t yet found.

All of this information-turmoil will yield inaccuracies, to be sure. Things can happen fast, and not everyone understands what’s going on. But what the turmoil’s mainly doing is making democratic editorial decisions. The turmoil represents a collective consciousness outside the established media, a force that can, if it wishes, move a story up and up in importance, until the amount of online attention and discourse the story attracts becomes the story.

Universities are accustomed to operating with a great deal of secrecy—in tenure decisions most notably, but also in other institutional circumstances. The blatancy of the Web clashes mightily with the reticent ethos of campuses. Thus the disdain many professors express for Rate My Professors and other online student evaluation sources, and their continued indifference or hostility even to high-profile academic blogs of the sort maintained by legal scholar Richard Posner and Nobelist Gary Becker (www.becker-posner-blog.com).

Universities are also highly localized. For all their talk of internationalism and diversity, they tend to be parochial institutions, committed to the particularities of their own history, as in the ongoing hysteria at the University of Illinois over the loss of their traditional sports mascot. With their inward-looking perspective, it doesn’t really occur to people at a lot of colleges and universities that an event at their school could within days get picked up by hundreds of global online news services.

Further, professors and their departments are accustomed to generous amounts of autonomy and independence. Even if they’re at a public institution, they’re likely to get very little oversight. The idea that there’s now an online city-that-never-sleeps ready to train its digital cameras on them hasn’t yet gotten through.

This combination of secrecy, parochialism, and autonomy means, in short, that many universities are unprepared for the Web’s amplification effect, the way its readers and writers can reach into a campus and internationalize personalities and events there.

Amplifications, and how to handle them
The Web can take an academic village and turn it into a metropolis. For example, the University of Tennessee (UT) was caught off-guard last year by a double scandal: one of its...
Amplification Effect

history professors is both a plagiarist and a diploma mill graduate. To this day, the man’s official university page continues to link UT’s name with a pulped book and a bogus degree. The blogosphere has gone to town on the story, creating widespread embarrassment for the university; yet UT has not taken the easy step of removing the Web page. Similarly, it took the University of Virginia much too long—over three months—to delete the university Web page of the associate director of their Center for Biomathematical Technology, a man who, among other things, tried to run over his ex-girlfriend.

Yale University shows how it ought to be done. When a business school professor there was dismissed for ethical irregularities, Yale made an immediate and thorough announcement (Tennessee has yet to say a word about its scandal) and yanked his Web page. Amplification averted. And about that immediate and thorough announcement: the World Wide Web means that there are potentially millions of people parsing official statements from university presidents, as Donna Shalala of the University of Miami discovered when her woefully inadequate remarks in the wake of on-field football riots hit the Web.

To take a more personal example, clicking through university stories one day, I paused on a small article in the University of Southern Illinois (SIU) student newspaper in which a student editorialist condemned professors there for not having attended a recent university-sponsored motivational speaker’s pep talk. I picked up the story for my blog (daily readership around 700), arguing that faculty were quite right to disdain a waste of time and money. Well-know journalist Scott McLemee read about SIU on my blog and expanded on the story at Inside Higher Education (daily readership in the hundreds of thousands). His story, in turn, attracted several comments from disaffected SIU professors, who provided yet more detail about what they see as the cynical mismanagement of their school. And so it goes.

Learning to love—or at least not hate—the Web

Many university administrators and faculty are hardwired to loathe the loose-jointed, populist, ramifying Web, and that is their prerogative. They are free to see its ways as a threat to serious scholarship, professorial autonomy, and so forth. But as the Web displaces physical newspapers and similar media to become the primary point of news access for more and more Americans, universities, with their often antiquated public relations offices and defensive instincts, are making themselves vulnerable to reputational damage.

This is particularly true when big, violent campus stories break, as they recently did at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (student riots) and Duquesne (a homicidal fight involving students and non-students). Student bloggers on the scene of these events are often the first to report them, so that when people Googled the names of the school involved, they were as likely to be linked to these citizen journalists as to larger media outlets. When University of California Santa Cruz Chancellor Denise Denton killed herself, once again it was students whose accounts—of events and of their feelings about them—appeared first.

The most violent story of all on an American campus—the massacre at Virginia Tech—was first reported in real time, as they slowly grasped what was happening to their school, by blogging reporters at the university’s online student newspaper. I first followed this story for my own blog via not only Virginia Tech newspaper bloggers, but also other independent student bloggers at the school. The national debate prompted by events at Virginia Tech as to whether smarter use of online communication...
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technologies by the school’s administration might have saved lives tells you all you need to know about the immediacy, power, and amplification of the Internet.

Indeed we know that bloggers can take a story and run with it: look, most recently, at the Ann Coulter “faggot” dustup. As Howard Kurtz notes in the Washington Post (2007, C01), “At first, Ann Coulter’s anti-gay crack at a Washington conference Friday drew almost no media coverage, although it was witnessed by hundreds of journalists and political operatives and captured by television cameras. But after some Democrats and liberal bloggers slammed the professional provocateur—and were joined by a number of Republicans and conservatives—it became a news story.”

Universities should have lots of on-campus bloggers—students, faculty, administrators—actively chronicling the life of the school, so that outsiders already know something of the reality of life there, and so that many voices at the university—official and unofficial—can have an immediate and accessible say in the presentation of its way of being to the world. What’s needed is an understanding of the new ways in which events will be transcribed and aired; what’s needed is the adoption of a substantial public online voice that can enter the fray with power and clarity.

Ironically, many people at universities think they’re protecting themselves by ignoring the Web. The anonymous “Ivan Tribble,” a professor at a midwestern liberal arts college, wrote a column in the Chronicle of Higher Education warning against hiring academic bloggers because “a blogger who joined our staff might air departmental dirty laundry (real or imagined) on the cyber clothesline for the world to see. Past good behavior is no guarantee against future lapses of professional decorum” (2005, C3). Tribble’s lowly metaphor—the departmental laundry—tells you all you need to know about the stubborn primness of some departments, for whom the Web is a clothesline on which someone might glimpse your undies.

The larger story
When I started blogging, I had no idea how long I’d be at it. I wondered whether American academia would produce enough stories to keep a site called University Diaries going. What I didn’t yet understand is that the technology of the Web pretty much guarantees that most university stories worth knowing—and America has tons of universities generating tons of stories, involving student alcoholism, administrative misbehavior, academic fraud, etc., etc.—will leap onto the clothesline, flapping to beat the band.

Of course there have always been investigative journalists and whistle blowers. But never before has a universally available technology of such rapid dissemination existed. And since it isn’t going anywhere, universities need to adjust to it. They need to adjust not merely because this and that story will become amplified, but also because there’s a large university story in the United States right now involving general discontent at enormously expensive tuitions and executive compensations, things universities aren’t doing a very good job of justifying. Americans question the price, meaning, and utility of a college education, and they’re right to. What exactly are colleges doing with their athletic programs and student fees and alumni contributions?

In the wake of Virginia Tech, moreover, Americans suddenly want to know much more about traditionally localized elements of campuses: What’s the university police force like? What lockdown procedures, if any, are there? How well-trained are the counselors at the mental health office? What are the procedures for having troubled students removed from professors’ classrooms?

As more and more Americans go to college and pay great sums of money to do so, colleges are compelled to expose more of what they do—academically, financially, administratively—to these people and their parents. Indeed, a rough distinction has begun to emerge between institutions willing to reach out to the public—like Washington’s Trinity College, whose president is one of a growing number of university presidents with their own blogs—and Tribble colleges, where faculty and administration gather their skirts tighter and tighter around themselves as the online world leans in for a closer look.

REFERENCES
Winter 2007, Vol. 93, No. 1
Bringing Theory to Practice
This issue provides an overview of the Bringing Theory to Practice project, an effort to advance engaged student learning and determine how it might improve the quality of students’ education, development, health, and commitment to civic engagement. Also included are articles on diversity, a reflection on teaching in a first-year program, and the executive summary of the new LEAP report.

Spring 2006, Vol. 92, No. 2
Academic Freedom
Among the articles on the featured topic is an official statement from AAC&U’s board of directors, as well as three responses to it. Also included are a discussion of the relationship between academic advising and liberal learning, a report from two engaged learning experiments, and a look at an institutional change initiative designed to foster “equity-mindedness.”

Summer 2006, Vol. 92, No. 3
2006 Annual Meeting
The summer issue includes selected papers presented at the meeting, “Demanding Excellence: Liberal Education in an Era of Global Competition, Anti-Intellectualism, and Disinvestment.” Additional articles explore collaborative scholarship and tenure, faculty engagement in the liberal arts, and the “success” of learning communities.

Fall 2006, Vol. 92, No. 4
Faculty Work
The articles in this issue examine threats to professional autonomy, the future of faculty governance, and support for faculty in the middle phase of their careers. Also included are the winning student essays from the University of Wisconsin System’s Liberal Arts Scholarship Competition and articles exploring the roles of “social justice” and “other ways of knowing” in liberal education.

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