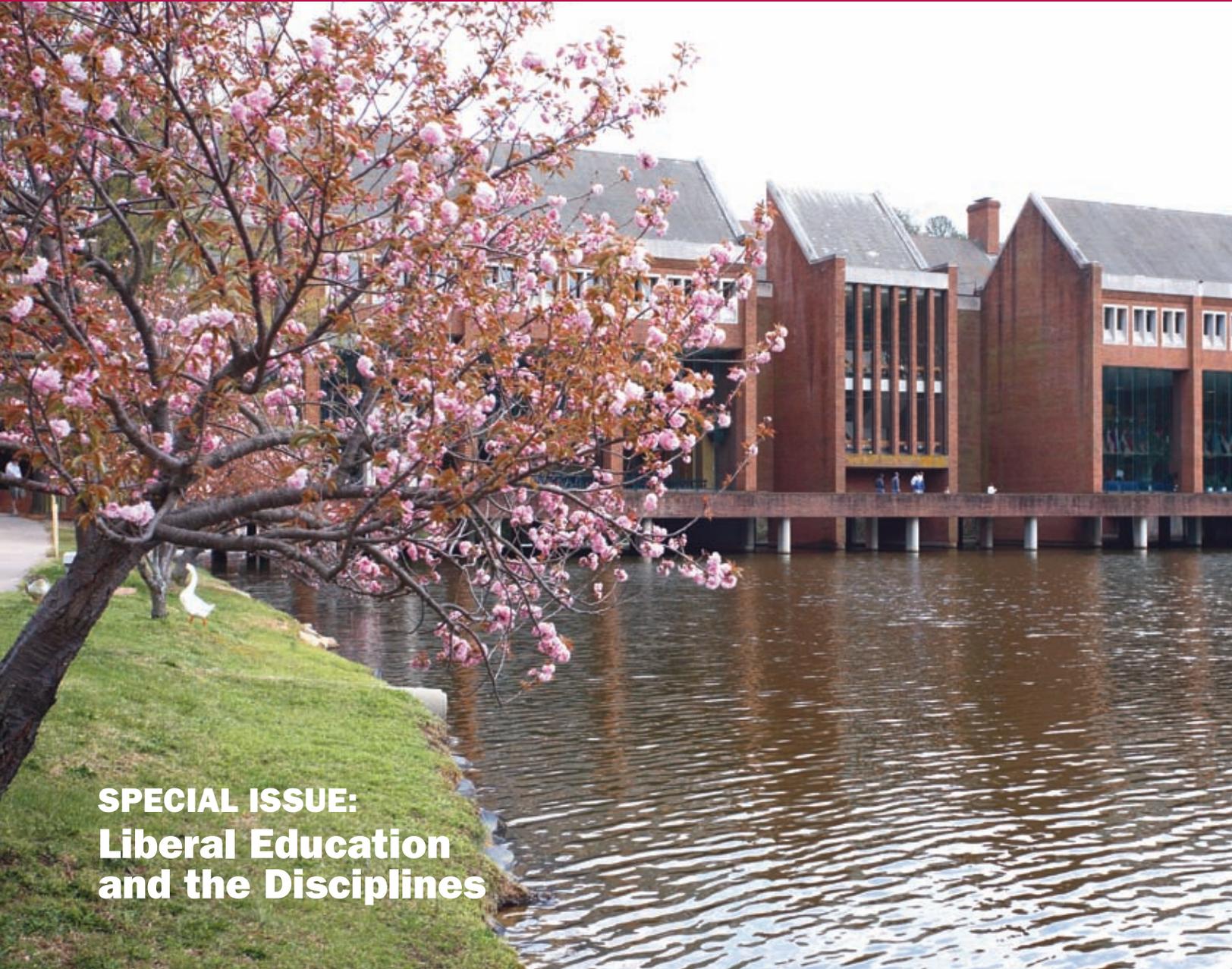


Liberal Education

VOL. 95, NO. 2 ◆ SPRING 2009

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



SPECIAL ISSUE: Liberal Education and the Disciplines

Biochemistry and Molecular Biology page 6

Classics page 14

Economics page 22

English and Foreign Languages page 30

History page 40

Religious Studies page 48

ALSO INSIDE:

Reclaiming the Intellectual Life page 56





LIBERAL EDUCATION AND THE DISCIPLINES

Student engagement and learning can be brought to a much higher level, if the work of departments is more closely coordinated with the rest of the curriculum.

—W. ROBERT CONNOR

■ ■ ■

FROM 1818 R STREET, NW

2 Guest Message

What's Happened to the Major in Liberal Education?

By *W. Robert Connor*

Over the years, majors have changed and so has our understanding of liberal education. Would the leaders of scholarly disciplines, then, be willing to take a fresh look at the relationship between the undergraduate major and liberal education? There was one way to find out...

4 From the Editor

5 News and Information

■ ■ ■

FEATURED TOPIC

6 The Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Major and Liberal Education

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Although expressed in language specific to the sciences, the skills emphasized in the recommended curriculum for the bachelor's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology mirror the learning outcomes recommended by AAC&U.

14 The Classics Major and Liberal Education

The Center for Hellenic Studies

The goal of studying undergraduate programs in classics was both to develop a better sense of how the major fits within the broader agenda of liberal education and to generate reflection and discussion among practitioners and stakeholders in the field.

22 The Economics Major and Liberal Education

By *David Colander and KimMarie McGoldrick*

If the economics major is to make the best possible contribution to the liberal education of undergraduate students, then much more discussion is needed about the content and focus of the economics major as well as how that content is taught.

30 The English or Foreign Language Major and Liberal Education

The Modern Language Association

A twenty-first-century liberal education must promote the linguistic powers, humanistic skills of analysis and argument, and cross-cultural awareness required for receiving and articulating ideas on an international stage, where the capacity to work comfortably in more than one language is the expectation and the norm.

COVER:

University of Richmond

40 The History Major and Liberal Education

The National History Center

History's contribution to liberal education can be enhanced by a more explicit understanding of the relationship between the history major and the broader goals and processes of liberal learning, and through consideration of that relationship in discussions about the curriculum.

48 The Religious Studies Major and Liberal Education

The American Academy of Religion

The evolving nature of the field—both with regard to global events and to the changing nature of the discussion of values within the modern academy—necessitates a reassessment of the undergraduate religion major and its role in advancing the larger goals of liberal education.

■ ■ ■

MY VIEW

56 Reclaiming the Intellectual Life for Posterity

By Alain de Botton

Too often, head-on assaults on the great questions are abandoned to the second-rate efforts of gurus and motivational speakers. It is time for high culture to reappropriate them and to consider them with all the rigor and seriousness currently too often lavished on topics of minor relevance.



What's Happened to the Major in Liberal Education?

In *Our Underachieving Colleges* (2006), Derek Bok points out that the original aim of requiring undergraduates to do concentrated work in a field was to develop capacities for thinking, problem solving, and “other habits of thought that almost any student could use with profit in later life.” Majoring in a discipline, then, was originally conceived as an essential part of a liberal education. Bok goes on, however, to cite research indicating that many majors as currently designed do not significantly advance the widely acknowledged goals of undergraduate education, and in some cases “are linked to declines in writing . . . and other important aims of a rounded liberal education.”

Over the years, majors have changed and so has our understanding of liberal education. Would the leaders of scholarly disciplines, then, be willing to take a fresh look at the relationship between the

GUEST MESSAGE

undergraduate major and liberal education? There was one way to find out: invite applications. That is

what the Teagle Foundation did in 2006. We were amazed by the size (fourteen) and quality (high) of the response to our request for proposals. In the end, we funded the projects of six disciplinary working groups, whose reports are summarized here.

As the projects got underway, we urged the working groups to do two things that were often lacking in similar inquiries: be *empirical* and be *inclusive*. These injunctions have been interpreted in different ways by the various disciplinary groups, but their white papers are all, in varying ways, based on evidence rather than opinion, and the process of analyzing that evidence has not been restricted to professors within the individual fields. The working groups have included colleagues from other disciplines and professions, graduates who have left academia behind, and undergraduates still crafting a liberal education out of the scattered building blocks their college or university calls a curriculum.

So what is to be learned now that the papers are complete? A lot of good news, I think, and a list of things that need to be done.

The good news includes, first, that the “Essential Learning Outcomes” set forth by AAC&U in *College Learning and the New Global Century* (2007) and elsewhere command great respect as a way of thinking about liberal education. These are ambitious goals, such as cognitive capacities including critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, as well as the development of personal values and social responsibility. Many of the working groups in this project accepted them as the gold standard for liberal education and went on to ask how majoring in their departments would help students reach those goals.

Second, those who worked on these white papers included leaders of their professions, eminent scholars, and other widely respected workers in these fields. That these leaders were willing to roll up

their sleeves points to the importance of rethinking the relationship between the major and liberal education. The topic belongs on every departmental agenda, as well as on the programs of professional societies and national organizations.

It's not all good news, however. While AAC&U's exploration of the goals of a genuine and robust liberal education has helped many institutions reformulate their educational mission, departmental goals are still often poorly aligned with those of the college or university. In fact, the situation is even worse than that: while content mastery is often specified in great detail, departments often fail to specify how the requirements of the major contribute to students' intellectual and personal growth. That appears also to be the case at the course level. As the report from the Center for Hellenic Studies points out, of 114 course syllabi in classics, "only one specifically addressed how . . . that course . . . fit within the objectives of the major"—let alone the goals of a liberal education. Comparable figures are not available for other fields, but it seems unlikely they would be much better.

Somewhere between the good news and the bad news falls the shibboleth of assessment. Without prodding from Teagle, many of the groups confronted the question of how to determine how much progress students are making toward the ambitious cognitive and personal goals of a liberal education. That question is now inescapable in higher education. But appropriate answers to it do not emerge with clarity in most of these reports. Is that because some of the desired outcomes, such as critical thinking, are "domain specific" and not amenable to cross-field evaluations such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment? It is more likely, I suspect, that the hard thinking about educationally appropriate forms of assessment that has been going on at the national level is only now beginning to shape departmental thinking about how to do the best educational job possible for all students.

While these reports show that we still have a long way to go, that should not obscure the implication of these white papers: *student engagement and learning can be brought to a much higher level, if the work of departments is more closely coordinated with the rest of the curriculum.*

Where does this work go from here? Most of the leaders of these groups want to follow up with more and wider "conversation," but also with action. There are, I suspect, success stories waiting to happen as these recommendations are applied and tested in departments in various fields and types of institutions around the country.

That may not be enough. If this work is to bear fruit, three deeply rooted parts of academia have to be weeded out. The first is a skewed reward structure that polarizes student learning and faculty research and then awards recognition only to the latter. The second is graduate education. The effective professor in tomorrow's college needs to be a master of more than field content and research methodology. Graduate education has to find better ways to help the next generation of faculty understand how students learn and how they can learn better. Third, the culture within departments has to change so student learning is at the top of the agenda. As these papers show, the time is ripe for doing things right.—W. ROBERT CONNOR is president of the Teagle Foundation

Departmental goals are still often poorly aligned with those of the college or university

In the late 1980s, the Association of American Colleges (as AAC&U was then known) launched the Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major, a three-year review of liberal arts and sciences majors within the context of liberal education. As part of the project, task forces appointed by twelve participating learned societies examined four broad issues within their specific fields: faculty responsibility for shaping the major program, organizing principles for structuring study-in-depth, processes for integrating learning, and relations between the major and other parts of the curriculum. The project culminated in the release of the first-ever national report on the undergraduate major, which identified four principles of a well-designed program of focused study: curricular coherence, critical perspectives, connected learning, and inclusiveness.

In Re-Forming the Major, a 1992 project that built on the earlier findings and recommendations, AAC&U worked closely with eight campuses as they set about making needed changes to their arts and sciences majors. The participating departments made significant progress on developing common courses or experiences in every major program and committed themselves to the goal of fostering connected learning. However, the

FROM THE EDITOR

project revealed less progress on, and even a certain resistance to, other key goals for reforming undergraduate majors:

seeking and valuing the participation of diverse students, helping students develop a critical perspective on their field through multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary experiences, and providing a coherent sequence of educational experiences. In 2001, the American Sociological Association—a participant in the Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major—appointed a second task force and, in *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated* (2004), also reported mixed results: “the second Task Force found that though some departments have made great strides toward sequencing within the major, there is still more work to do to enhance the vitality and increase the coherence of sociology programs nationwide.”

And how has liberal education itself changed over the past two decades? Perhaps most significantly, a broad consensus has formed around the notion that specific liberal learning outcomes are essential for all college students, regardless of their major. As a result, liberal education is today increasingly less restricted to colleges of arts and sciences, and outmoded curricular models that had effectively relegated the goals of liberal education to the general education program have begun to give way to new models that focus on students’ cumulative and integrative learning across the entire curriculum—including, importantly, within the context of the major.

Given these related and ongoing developments—the reform of the undergraduate major and the revitalization of liberal education—what is the current relationship between the major and liberal education, and what directions for reform would disciplinary societies recommend today? In 2006, the Teagle Foundation funded six disciplinary working groups to examine these questions. The groups have now all presented their findings in white papers, and AAC&U is pleased to publish here abridgments of these important and illuminating reports.—DAVID TRITELLI

Vice President for
Communications
and Public Affairs
Debra Humphreys

Academic Editor
David Tritelli

Associate Editor
Laura Donnelly-Smith

Production Manager
Darbi Bossman

Design
Liz Clark

Liberal Education (ISSN 0024-1822) is published quarterly by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Annual rates are \$50 for individual subscribers and \$60 for libraries. Foreign rates are available. Subscription information can be found online at www.aacu.org/liberaleducation.

AAC&U invites manuscripts that promote liberal learning in a broad sense. For writer’s guidelines and other communications see www.aacu.org/liberaleducation, write to the editor of *Liberal Education* at the above address, or send e-mail to tritelli@aacu.org.

Liberal Education is indexed in the fall issue and is available on microfilm from ProQuest Information and Learning, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

©2009 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Permission is granted for individuals to make single copies for personal use in research, study, or teaching. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of AAC&U.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to *Liberal Education*; 1818 R Street, NW; Washington, DC 20009.

AAC&U Member Survey Findings Released

A recently completed survey of AAC&U member institutions revealed that the vast majority (nearly 80 percent) have formal, stated learning goals that apply to all students. The skills most widely addressed in goals statements are writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, oral communication, intercultural skills, information literacy, and ethical reasoning. The knowledge areas most often required of all students are humanities, sciences, social sciences, global cultures, and mathematics. About three-quarters of AAC&U members assess whether students have achieved these learning outcomes across the curriculum, beyond the use of grades. Campuses are employing a variety of assessment methods including electronic portfolios, capstone courses, rubrics applied to samples of student work, and standardized tests of critical thinking.

More than two-thirds of the colleges and universities surveyed use a general education model that combines course choice with other integrative features like learning communities or thematic required courses. Only 15 percent use a distribution model alone. Reports on the AAC&U survey are available online at www.aacu.org/membership.

AAC&U Invites Nominations for Board of Directors

AAC&U is currently accepting nominees for members of the association's 2010 board of directors. Any individual from a member campus is eligible to serve on the AAC&U board. The current members are listed on the inside back cover of *Liberal Education* as well as online at www.aacu.org. Letters of nomination should be sent to Bethany Zecher Sutton, secretary to the board, 1818 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009 or via e-mail to sutton@aacu.org.

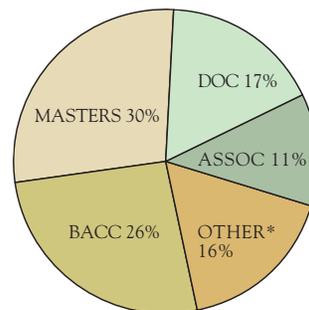
New Publication on Academic Freedom, Peer Review, and Shared Governance

The first in a new series of occasional papers from AAC&U, *The Future of the Professoriate* explores the concepts of academic freedom, peer review, and shared governance in light of ongoing changes in the academy that threaten to undermine them. The authors frame a series of especially urgent and timely questions about the future of the academic profession as well as propose specific directions for reform and strategies for revitalizing the profession's social contract. More information about this new publication is available online at www.aacu.org/publications.

Upcoming Meetings

- May 29–June 2, 2009
Institute on General Education
University of Minnesota
- June 17–21, 2009
Greater Expectations Institute: Leadership to Make Excellence Inclusive
University of Vermont
- July 8–12, 2009
Engaging Departments Institute
University of Pennsylvania
- October 1–3, 2009
Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility: Deepening Student and Campus Commitments
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- October 22–24, 2009
Integrative Learning: Addressing the Complexities
Atlanta, Georgia

AAC&U MEMBERSHIP 2008
1,200 members



*Specialized schools, state systems and agencies, international affiliates, and organizational affiliates

VISIT OUR WEB SITE

www.aacu.org

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR
BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

The Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Major and Liberal Education

THE DEFINING TASK for undergraduate departments is the design of a major, including the number and content of courses as well as other requirements.

Department members must weigh the desire to produce graduates superbly prepared for further study against the charge that the major requires too large a share of an undergraduate's course options. This dilemma is particularly striking for the sciences at undergraduate institutions where faculty are committed to the breadth of the liberal arts but also pride themselves on the number of students going on to graduate school or employment in scientific fields.

Biochemistry and molecular biology (BMB) are often among the most demanding majors in terms of course requirements. In addition to the linear nature of all science programs, which hinders the flexibility of a major, BMB are interdisciplinary fields that integrate material from courses in different departments. Tension between contributing departments often leads to an increase in the number of required courses.

Since 1992, the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) has supported a recommended curriculum for the bachelor's degree in BMB. In the years since it was developed, this curriculum has been modified to emphasize skills rather than coursework. In addition to defining core content in chemistry, biology, and allied fields, the society has published a list of skills to be achieved. Although expressed in language specific to the sciences, these skills mirror the learning outcomes recommended by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in its 2007 report, *College Learning for the New Global Century* (see p. 32). Mapping the two sets

The one clear finding of this study is that undergraduate research is regarded as centrally important to the preparation of scientists



Figure 1	
AAC&U	ASBMB
Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the fundamentals of chemistry and biology and the key principles of biochemistry and molecular biology
Intellectual and Practical Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry and analysis • Critical and creative thinking • Written and oral communication • Quantitative literacy • Information literacy • Teamwork and problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to assess primary papers critically • Good quantitative skills • Ability to design experiments and understand the limitations of the experimental approach • Ability to interpret experimental data • Ability to design follow-up experiments • Ability to work safely and effectively in a laboratory • Awareness of the available resources and how to use them • Ability to use computers as information and research tools • Ability to collaborate with other researchers • Ability to use oral, written, and visual presentations to present their work to both a science-literate and a science-non-literate audience
Personal and Social Responsibility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic knowledge and engagement (local and global) • Intercultural knowledge and competence • Ethical reasoning and action • Foundations and skills for lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the major issues at the forefront of the discipline • Awareness of the ethical issues in the molecular life sciences
Integrative Learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to dissect a problem into its key features • Ability to think in an integrated manner and look at problems from different perspectives

of skills onto one another indicates where the ASBMB guidelines are strongest and where they might be supplemented (see fig. 1).

Through a survey of department chairs and instructors, we sought to learn how widely the ASBMB-recommended curriculum and skills are understood by departments, at what levels the skills are introduced, what methods of pedagogy are employed, and how often open-ended research problems are presented to students. Broader-ranging questions about the role of BMB in liberal education were explored

through interviews and open sessions at the 2007 ASBMB national meeting.

Survey findings

The survey revealed that 59 percent of schools grant only the Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in BMB, 20 percent grant only the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in BMB, and the remaining 21 percent grant both types of degree. The major goes by many names, but the vast majority are housed within chemistry (or chemistry and biochemistry) or biology departments.

Approximately half the schools surveyed take account of ASBMB guidelines in designing their majors, and most of the others are aware of the guidelines but do not use them explicitly. Only 12 percent were unaware of the guidelines.

The biggest change that has occurred to the major since 1990 is an increase in the use of technology. Other notable changes include the introduction of more undergraduate research, more specific coursework, and more assessment of student learning. More than one-quarter of respondents reported no change to the structure of the major over this period of time.

Department chairs reported that the skills listed in the ASBMB guidelines are integral to their programs. However, many of the transferable skills—oral communication, scientific writing, reading primary literature—are taught only at the advanced level. Statistics instruction is more evenly divided between introductory and advanced courses, but at one-quarter of institutions statistics is not taught within the context of the major at all. The instructor survey provided a more detailed view of how skills are introduced and reinforced over the course of a student's program. Basic skills and knowledge are assumed by the time students reach the advanced level, while more sophisticated skills are first introduced at the upper level.

Opinion of integrated courses is divided. Some think these are a good idea but administratively difficult to offer; others believe that students first need a strong grounding in specific disciplines before moving on to interdisciplinary work.

Broader findings

Undergraduate faculty. There are fewer differences now than in the past between college and university experiences for undergraduates, and undergraduate research is now seen as essential to both. But where we do find differences, it is hard to tell whether they are due to curricula or to smaller class sizes and more direct interaction with faculty. Younger faculty, in particular, felt that students at liberal arts colleges develop a skill set that is broader and more flexible than that developed by university students. Even when there are wide distribution requirements for students pursuing the BS degree, the faculty can signal that they are not taken seriously by scientists. It is difficult to assess the effect of undergraduate

programs on students' eventual success; graduates often take time off before entering graduate programs, and the work experience also has some influence.

Interdisciplinary fields like biochemistry are much more amenable than narrower fields to students from a variety of backgrounds. One of the goals of an interdisciplinary course should be for students to gain an understanding of its bases in the parent disciplines. Integrated, team-taught, first-year science courses should be offered to all students, not just majors. Whereas science majors at liberal arts colleges take many nonscience courses, nonscience majors take no more science than is required—and none at all where there is no requirement. Science majors are, therefore, much more broadly educated. Students are under considerable pressure to declare a major quickly, and the choice is driven largely by how well they performed in high school courses. Students who did not do well in high school courses in particular subjects are unlikely to take courses in those subjects while in college.

In constructing a liberal arts curriculum, it is difficult to be respectful of all fields without imposing a false symmetry. Other fields are more accessible than the sciences. It is not clear that the humanities are progressive in the same sense as the sciences; that is, what was done in teaching English one hundred years ago may still be relevant, but this is likely not the case in biology. The relationship between the history of the discipline and the discipline itself is different for the sciences.

Graduate faculty. In the opinion of all those surveyed, a strong undergraduate research program is the best preparation for graduate school. If an institution does not offer research opportunities to undergraduates, it might partner with others that do, or with industrial or government labs. The quality of students makes a big difference. All students can get up to speed eventually, but graduate school advisers want students to hit the ground running. Nonscientists do not believe their majors need more science, largely because they see themselves as teaching the same kinds of critical thinking skills within their own disciplines.

A course on the history and philosophy of science could teach both scientists and nonscientists how scientific knowledge is constructed. Such a course was also deemed by

The College
of Wooster

respondents to be an excellent way to develop some of the desired skills—including ethics—that are currently taught as part of a mentored research experience.

Industry. There is consensus on the need for a meaningful research experience, as opposed to a “research-like” course. A significant majority of respondents deemed practical, independent research experience to be the most important aspect of training for employment in the industrial sector. Equally valued are strong written and oral communication skills. Several respondents also mentioned interviewing skills and the ability to present a well-developed seminar as well as quantitative science skills and exposure to matrix organizations.

Respondents saw no meaningful difference between BA and BS graduates, although there was a slight preference for the latter since these students have usually taken more science courses. In either case, electives should complement the major. All saw value in a broad liberal education that teaches tolerance, acceptance, and challenge; these are important characteristics needed for success in an industrial research and development environment. A liberal education also hones writing, general communication, and creative thinking skills. Further, it avoids the dangers of overspecialization.

Textbooks. Textbooks are designed to present fundamental knowledge, rather than to develop skills. The impetus for curricular change should come from instructors, but many biochemists believe that textbooks *can* drive change. Progressive disclosure and problem-based learning

cannot be done in a textbook, so the burden falls to the instructor. End-of-chapter questions can be designed to test cognitive skills without too much change to the rest of the text. Upper-level books often have less interesting and less challenging questions and problem sets than introductory texts, which take advantage of a wide range of real-world examples. It can be easier to teach nonmajors because there is no need to worry about “coverage” or building a base for subsequent courses.

Instructors (and students) are overwhelmed by curricular content goals, and it may be possible to coordinate with other disciplines to avoid duplication. The National Science Foundation is interested in creating texts that are shorter, contain core concepts only, and allow students to get more specific information from other sources. Most scientists would say that content is not as important as process, but students need terminology and fundamentals as a base and a “hook.” Scientists disagree on the amount and balance of content and concept, however. Meaningful assessment is difficult, and most instructors do not know how to assess beyond content.

Career preparation. BMB is good preparation for several careers, but advising is often absent. Precollege teaching is an especially important career path, but it is also one made difficult by state and institutional rules. For example, in many states a BMB major would not be eligible to teach chemistry, so there is a disincentive to major in BMB. There are alternative certification programs, including postbaccalaureate years or summer workshops.

As for all teaching programs, there is a high burnout rate.

Assessment. We have not agreed on the standards for outcomes assessment or how to determine the benefits of a BMB degree for undergraduates. The difference between the BS and the BA complicates the analysis; so too does the fact that many students take time off between college and graduate school, which makes it difficult to attribute success or failure to undergraduate preparation. Until we find effective ways to assess skills, as opposed to content, we cannot know whether students are acquiring them. Accreditation is a heavy-handed tool to drive assessment; tools internal to the scientific community would be better suited to our goals.

Undergraduate research

The one clear finding of this study is that undergraduate research is regarded as centrally important to the preparation of scientists. The ASBMB recommendation that programs be designed to ensure a solid foundation of coursework that allows students to go on to a meaningful research experience may seem straightforward, but there is much uncertainty and even disagreement underlying it. What constitutes a “meaningful” experience? How long should it last? Must the project have outside funding or result in peer-reviewed publication? If the experience is defined as an extended period lasting one year or more, and if we expect publication-quality research, then there will be a shortage of space to accommodate all BMB majors in faculty labs.

The reported learning gains from a research experience have been clearly documented (Seymour, et al. 2003; Lopatto 2003). Some of the gains are closely connected to specific scientific skills and knowledge, such as learning lab techniques, understanding the primary literature, and interpreting results. Others are more generalizable and fit well with the AAC&U categories, such as understanding how knowledge is constructed, developing oral and written presentation skills, and learning ethical conduct. Still others—tolerance for obstacles, learning to work independently, self-confidence, and clarification of a career path—relate to student development.

When a full research experience is not possible, can students gain these skills in other ways? Our working group thought not, but a

recent study suggests that at least some of the desired skills can be acquired from “research-like” courses (Lopatto 2006). These are courses that include some or all of the following elements: a lab or project where no one knows the outcome, a project in which students have some input into the research process, a project entirely designed by students, opportunities for students to become responsible for part of a project, and opportunities for students to critique the work of their peers. With regard to the skills involved in interpreting results, analyzing data, reading primary literature, and communicating orally, students reported gaining at least as much—and occasionally more—from courses that score high in these activities as they gain from research experiences. On the other hand, students with a summer or more of research experience reported greater gains in terms of readiness for more advanced research, understanding how to approach real problems, lab techniques, and independence. Research-like courses may be good preparation for a “real” research experience, but they cannot serve as a substitute.

The BA/BS question

Those of us at liberal arts colleges, which produce a disproportionate number of PhDs in the sciences, began this study by assuming that the broad skills gained with a BA would be highly valued by graduate schools and employers. Some of us were surprised and dismayed to learn that depth in the discipline is valued over breadth. Because they equate “liberal education” with “liberal arts education,” many scientists (and other academics) do not see its relevance to their institutions and disciplines. Yet as the AAC&U definition of liberal education makes clear, a liberal education can occur at all types of colleges and universities.

We need to articulate those elements of a liberal education that are essential for scientists operating in society, and then see how they fit into the BA-versus-BS divide. Students can be prepared by either degree for different career paths, but they need strong advising. Institutions that grant only the BA should make clear to students what courses—including research experiences—they will need if they intend to pursue further study in the field. Employers and graduate faculties should be made aware of the broad education of liberal arts graduates. Studies have shown that alumni of liberal arts

colleges quickly overcome any short-term deficit they may have in preparation for graduate school, and that their strong communication and critical thinking skills give them a long-term advantage.

Pedagogy

We need to publicize broadly the innovative and effective pedagogies that are already in use within the BMB community. The physics and chemistry education communities have led the way in documenting how active learning techniques improve understanding and performance. There is an extensive literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning in those fields. Biology and its subdisciplines have lagged behind the physical sciences, perhaps because it is more difficult to articulate core concepts. However, several programs that support biology education reform have been funded by the National Science Foundation. Moreover, the American Society for Microbiology manages a research “residency” designed to develop understanding of evidence-based research in biology education and to help educators develop assessment tools for student learning.

There are already many examples of effective approaches to teaching biochemistry that employ active learning, including problem-based learning (PBL), process-oriented guided inquiry learning (POGIL), peer-led team learning (PTL), Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT),

and the case-study approach. All these are based on research about how students learn, and all can be adapted for a variety of settings. One method that is particularly well suited to large lecture classes is the use of “clickers.” In spite of much evidence that the traditional lecture format is the least effective for long-term learning or creating excitement about the discipline, our survey data show that most courses are still taught in this way.

It is important for participants in faculty development sessions to be exposed to practical ideas for teaching, student learning, and curriculum design, and that the ideas are implemented successfully. Presenters should have knowledge of science as well as knowledge of educational methods and theory. Even when convinced of the need for new teaching methods, scientists still need assistance in implementing changes in their own courses. The sessions should include workshops in which colleagues participate actively in applying the educational ideas to some aspect of their own teaching, assessment, or curricular materials. The workshop should end with a short-term evaluation and include longer-term follow up. Assessment is another tool for promoting the development of better pedagogy and teaching scholarship. Once instructors create or adopt assessments of student learning, they begin to question how best to support students and help them develop cognitive skills.

The issue of effective pedagogy is related to the problematic separation between faculty whose main focus is research and faculty whose main focus is education. The separation roughly corresponds to the divide between research universities and small colleges, although there are certainly many faculty at research universities deeply involved in teaching and many at small colleges who are equally engaged in teaching and research. The lack of attention to pedagogy is certainly not unique to BMB. If we want to broaden the discussion about BMB education, we must consider the reward system in the academy, and we must make it easier for faculty to learn about and incorporate new pedagogical methods. Project Kaleidoscope (www.pkal.org) is an invaluable resource for small colleges, and one that could be made more available to interested faculty who teach undergraduates at all types of institutions.

Teagle Working Group Members

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) Working Group included the following members: Trevor R. Anderson, University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa); J. Ellis Bell, University of Richmond; Judith S. Bond, Penn State College of Medicine; Rodney Boyer, Hope College; Robert A. Copeland, EpiZyme, Inc.; Barbara Gordon, ASBMB; Nicole Kresge, ASBMB; Peter A. Rubinstein, University of Iowa Carter College of Medicine; and Adele J. Wolfson (chair), Wellesley College.

Working Group Recommendations

As part of the Teagle Foundation initiative on the relationship between the disciplines and undergraduate liberal education, the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Working Group issued a series of specific recommendations for improving the biochemistry and molecular biology majors. The recommendations can be found in the full report of the working group, which is available online at www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/publications.aspx.

We cannot underestimate the barriers to changing the culture in ways that promote effective teaching

We cannot underestimate the barriers to changing the culture in ways that promote effective teaching. But adopting the skills-based curriculum recommended by ASBMB is a first step. Assessment of student gains in these skills would further advance the conversation. Once faculty members see the gap between desired skills and attained skills, they may be motivated to modify their teaching methods.

In addition to the effective teaching of courses in the majors, we sought information on nonmajor courses with BMB content. One-semester biochemistry courses intended for pre-med or other science students are subject to many of the same pressures discussed above—content versus skills, lecture versus active learning. However, there are very few courses for nonscientists, probably because biochemistry and molecular biology build on introductory science courses and would require multiple prerequisites. There are a few examples of first-year seminars created around a particular faculty member's interests, and there are integrated introductory science courses that begin with large interdisciplinary problems before drilling down to basic principles. We encourage the BMB community to share examples of such courses and evaluate their effect on both student learning and recruitment into the major.

Assessment

Quite apart from the recent emphasis on assessment by granting agencies and accrediting bodies, it is obvious that cycles of innovation, assessment, evaluation, and redesign are as much a part of education as they are of scientific research. The challenge is to find assessment tools that provide real information about student learning and that are accepted by the BMB community.

AAC&U emphasizes that good assessment involves multiple measures over time. Assignments and exams already built into courses can provide one of these measures, as long as they are carefully designed and are not used just to produce a student grade. Several AAC&U publications outline the types of assessment that address student gains in each of the skills categories discussed above. We also recommend that instructors and programs use the "liberal education scorecard" (Wick and

Phillips 2008) to determine how elements of liberal education are balanced within their courses and majors.

Changes to the recommended curriculum

The skills included in ASBMB's recommended curriculum are indeed the ones considered essential by the membership. As we examined the relationship between these skills and those identified by AAC&U, some gaps became apparent—particularly in the category of personal and social responsibility. There is no explicit reference to the ways that scientists are engaged with the larger community. Some of our respondents have also suggested including "independent thinking" (in addition to teamwork). Besides these general skills, some skills specific to BMB have become more important since the publication of the earlier list. These include visual literacy and advanced quantitative skills including modeling. □

REFERENCES

- Association of American Colleges and Universities. What is liberal education? www.aacu.org/leap/What_is_Liberal_Education.cfm.
- . 2007. *College learning for the new global century: A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lopatto, D. 2003. What undergraduate research can tell us about research on learning. web.grinnell.edu/science/ROLE/WhatUndergraduateResearchCanTellUs.pdf.
- . 2006. Student responses to undergraduate research experiences and research-like courses: SURE and CURE. Paper Presented at the meeting of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professors, Chevy Chase, MD.
- Seymour, E., A. B. Hunter, S. Laursen, and T. DeAntoni. 2003. Establishing the benefits of research experiences for undergraduates in the sciences: First findings from a three-year study. *Science Education* 88: 493–534.
- Wick, M. R., and A. T. Phillips. 2008. A liberal education scorecard. *Liberal Education* 94 (1): 22–29.

The Classics Major and Liberal Education

OVER THE COURSE OF EIGHTEEN MONTHS, a project based at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, DC, studied undergraduate programs in classics with the goal of developing a better sense of how a major in classics fit within the broader agenda of liberal education. The study adopted a student-centered approach, employing a team of six undergraduates and one first-year graduate student to conduct the research,¹ and began with two empirical questions: what constitutes a major in classics, and what kind of department offers such a major?

To answer these questions, a team of undergraduates collected information about major programs of study in classics, starting with an initial survey of colleges and universities that yielded a list of 305 institutions where students could major in the field. The team narrowed the sample and focused primarily on programs at sixty-nine liberal arts colleges, five institutions that offer a terminal master's degree in classics and ten universities that offer a PhD.

The first part of this article discusses what we learned from assembling this information. The second part focuses on what members of the classics community—especially the students—at four of the liberal arts colleges in the sample had to say about liberal education and the classics. Both parts include some ideas, based on our observations, about improving programs of study in general or, at the very least, providing undergraduate students with a better understanding of how engagement in a particular field of study fits within the overall experience of gaining a liberal education.

The first part of this article discusses what we learned from assembling this information. The second part focuses on what members of the classics community—especially the students—at four of the liberal arts colleges in the sample had to say about liberal education and the classics. Both parts include some ideas, based on our observations, about improving programs of study in general or, at the very least, providing undergraduate students with a better understanding of how engagement in a particular field of study fits within the overall experience of gaining a liberal education.

Survey of major programs

For approximately six weeks during the summers of 2007 and 2008, two undergraduates “mined” information on the Internet. The use of online sources was deliberate for two reasons. First, colleges now use the Web as the

primary vehicle for publishing institutional information. This is particularly true for two audiences colleges are anxious to reach. The first consists of prospective and incoming students who lack access to other sources of information, such as advice from other students and members of the faculty. The second consists of students themselves, especially the generation of “digital natives” who rely predominantly on the Internet whether seeking “official” information—for example, what they find on college Web sites—or staying connected with a network of “unofficial” sources who report on the current state of affairs through tweets and updates to pages on Facebook and MySpace.

The students developed a database to manage the information, collecting information in 130 fields divided into nine categories: institutional profile, program scheduling, enrollment, demographics, graduation requirements, departmental profile, major, faculty, and courses. We developed the fields for the first four categories based on what a college reports in its Common Data Set (CDS), thinking that colleges would provide fairly ready access to that information—if not in the form of the CDSs themselves, then in other areas of their Web sites. As it turned out, however, that was not the case at all. Only twenty-two institutions made their CDS available online—or more accurately, perhaps, the students found CDSs on only twenty-two Web sites. To offer just one example of their success using college Web sites, the students were able to collect complete data on the number of applicants (male and female), the number of accepted applicants (male and female), and the number of students enrolled (male and female) for only fifty-one institutions. Ultimately, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the National Center for Education Statistics proved much

Departments should be more explicit about how the study of their discipline relates to the broader goals of liberal education



CAROL & PARK B. SMITH HALL



easier to use and more comprehensive. Fortunately for students (both current and prospective) this data, as of 2007, is fully accessible through the College Navigator. The situation—in which an organization collects comprehensive information, passes it on to external agency, but fails to make it available to its own community, at least through its Web site—recurs at the departmental level.

Information in the fifth category, graduation requirements, proved much easier to find and more complete, primarily because most college Web sites provide either online versions of their catalogues or the option of downloading a copy in Portable Document Format (PDF). As the team worked on the core of our survey, assembling information about the objectives of the departments, the faculty, characteristics of the majors, and individual courses—all aspects within the purview of the departments themselves—they often encountered complications. Information about faculty members and lists of courses offer examples that illustrate the most common problems.

Departments regularly list faculty members who are not offering courses and whose roles in the department are unclear. They tend to be

The information that departments provide often undermines their own efforts to encourage a more deliberate approach to a field of study on the part of their undergraduate students

emeriti, professors who are on leave, professors whose names remain on departmental Web sites after they have left the institution, or affiliated faculty members who may or may not contribute actively to the goals of the department. Furthermore, the profiles of the faculty members almost always list their educational back-

ground, research interests, and publications. The profiles less frequently include courses they are currently teaching. Still fewer profiles list courses they have taught in the past, and only a very few include courses they will teach in future semesters. This is at odds with the basic needs of undergraduates. When considering a particular major or working on a plan of study, they primarily care about what courses the department offers, when the department offers them, who teaches them, and how the courses will contribute to their individual aspirations (Will the course help me get into medical school? Get a job? Improve my language skills?) or meet institutional demands (Does this course fulfill my humanities requirement?). In other words, the information that departments provide, primarily in conformity with the expectations of other faculty members and administrators, often undermines their own



College of William and Mary

efforts to encourage a more deliberate approach to a field of study on the part of their undergraduate students, which would include, for example, taking increasingly rigorous courses that complement and supplement one another, feature a variety of approaches, and develop different but related skills.

With regard to the list of courses that fulfill the requirements of a major, departments at the liberal arts colleges in our sample fell into two categories: those that allow students to take courses in other departments, and those that do not. Among the former, the average number of courses listed (including cross listings or offerings listed under the title of other departments) was fifty, and the average number of faculty members was 3.8. Among the latter, the average number of courses was thirty-nine, and the average number of faculty was 3.6. Departments in both groups offer a significant number of those courses at least every year and sometimes every semester. Consequently, departments tend to list far more courses than they can regularly offer. A long and varied array of courses might express the diversity of subjects within our discipline and reflect broad interests and areas of expertise within the faculty, but it might prove misleading for undergraduates who have to make real choices over a limited span of semesters. What specifically should departments do to address the needs of their undergraduates, the “digital natives” who now populate their classrooms?

First, faculty members should provide more information than was expected in the era of printed catalogues and ephemeral course schedules. A list of past, current, and future courses is an appropriate place to begin. With regard to future courses, departments should develop a schedule of courses more than one year in advance. By nature, academic programs are fluid; professors come and go; research interests evolve; and events in the world suggest and call for new approaches and topics. Nevertheless, departments should provide at least tentative schedules. Institutions typically require students who declare majors (usually in their sophomore years) to outline how they intend to fulfill the requirement for the major over their remaining years in college. Departments ought to work with their students on the same terms.

Second, developing and updating departmental Web sites should be one of the primary

responsibilities of the department. Web sites are no longer static representations of printed materials. Institutions refine their sites on a nearly continual basis to attract and keep target audiences more effectively. This means that the information departments routinely provide to various administrative offices often finds its way onto the institutional Web sites before departments can make appropriate revisions to their own data. Also, in an effort to provide more consistent information to online audiences, colleges segment and bundle information from a number of institutional sources to create what appear to be Web sites for programs and departments. These descriptions and overviews may or may not correlate with sites maintained by the departments themselves. Finally, more and more college Web sites are moving away from reflecting the organizational structure of the institutions (departments and divisions) and toward a focus on areas of study, partly in response to the proliferation of interdisciplinary programs. This means that Web sites now feature multiple avenues for arriving at information about departments and majors. Individual programs need to monitor their departmental and institutional Web sites to ensure that visitors of all varieties arrive at information that is consistent, relevant, and up to date.

Third, departments should be more explicit about how the study of their discipline relates to the broader goals of liberal education. As mentioned above, one of the basic objectives of the study was to gain a sense of how departments—as organizational units and as collections of individual professors—view the relationship of classics as a field of study to the overall enterprise of liberal education. For forty-two of the liberal arts colleges we sampled—just over half—the team collected mission statements from both the institution and the classics department (or program). We analyzed these statements using a rubric based on the list of outcomes from the Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2007; see p. 32) and found that, viewed independently from each other, the institutional and departmental statements represent different objectives and emphases. Within a more comprehensive framework of objectives, however, they work complementarily. The challenge lies in creating such a framework for

students. Because the process of emending institutional mission statements represents a daunting challenge in most cases, each department should assume responsibility for including language in the description of its program that relates the department's more focused, discipline-based objectives to the more inclusive institutional goals and the overarching outcomes of liberal education.

Surveys and interviews

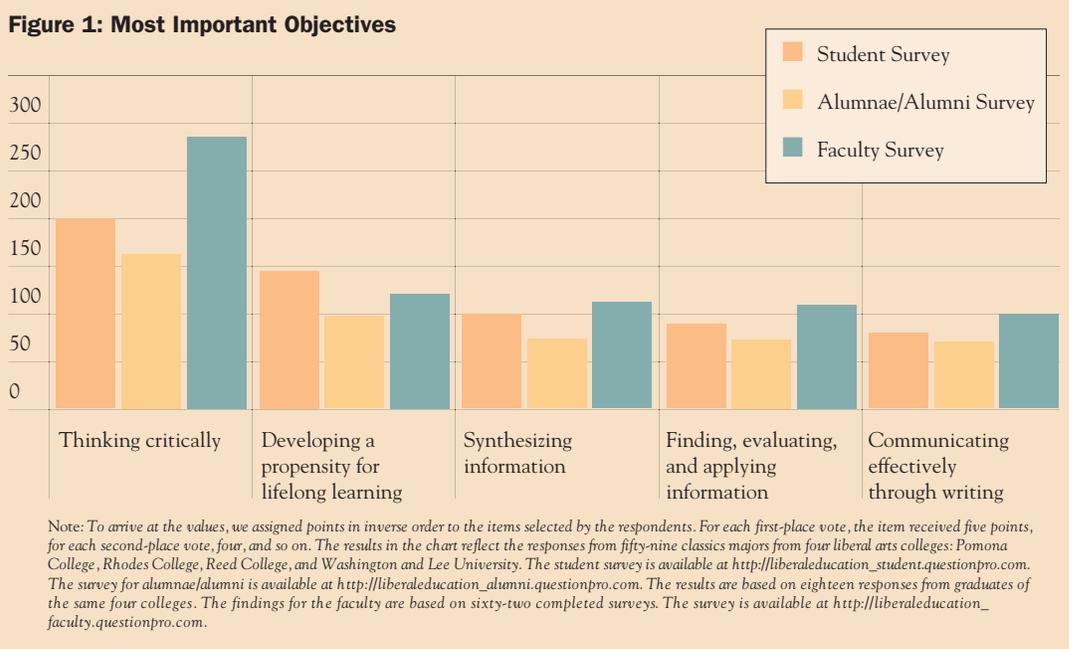
Looking beyond the published mission statements and departmental profiles, the project sought to learn from the practitioners themselves about the relationship between the study of classics and the process of gaining a liberal education. Again, we began with a basic question: what does liberal education mean to members of the classics community—classics majors, faculty members, and graduates of classics programs? In separate but related surveys, we asked respondents from each of these groups to consider various objectives of liberal education compiled from several descriptive statements: A liberal education helps students develop

- a commitment to serve the community and society;
- the ability to find, evaluate, and apply information from a variety of sources;
- the ability to communicate effectively through writing;

- the ability to synthesize information in a variety of forms from different domains of knowledge;
- an awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences;
- the ability to think critically;
- an understanding of and proclivity toward behaviors that promote health and well-being;
- a propensity for lifelong learning;
- the ability to formulate and solve problems;
- the ability to work effectively with others;
- the ability to communicate effectively through speaking;
- an appreciation of competing ideas and perspectives;
- a familiarity and understanding of art in a variety of media;
- the ability to use mathematics;
- a sense of and commitment to ethical behavior;
- the ability to use information technology.

We then asked the respondents to identify the objectives they found consistent with their own understanding of liberal education. In a follow-up question, we presented them with a list of their selections and asked them to identify the five most important objectives and rank them (see fig. 1).

This pair of questions yielded two results that call for some commentary within the context of the entire study. First, respondents in all three surveys ranked developing “the





ability to think critically” as the most important objective by a wide margin. This emphasis on critical thinking differed considerably from what we found in the departmental descriptions, which mentioned critical thinking as a departmental objective in only seven of forty-two cases (17 percent). In contrast, thirty-one departmental statements discussed information literacy (for example, in the form of being able to read Greek and Latin texts in the original languages), and twenty-one statements identified integration of learning (as reflected in the ability to make connections between the past and present) as a learning objective. One explanation for this discrepancy lies in the concept of critical thinking itself, which may represent for respondents the most generic and encompassing of the outcomes, one that pertains more properly to the institution as a whole. In fact, twenty-nine of the institutional mission statements (69 percent) identified the ability to think critically as an educational outcome. Also, because it ultimately subsumes a number of other more precise objectives,

critical thinking was a convenient choice when our respondents faced the task of eliminating some objectives and ranking others. A second explanation may lie in the way classicists differentiate themselves from their peers in other academic disciplines.

While all the departments fixed their discipline within the humanities, seventeen of the departmental statements emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of the field, and more than half mentioned the social sciences (anthropology, for example) and arts (including theatre and art history) as areas vital to the study of the ancient Greeks and Romans. What seems to unify classicists and distinguish them from their colleagues in allied fields is their emphasis on the ancient languages, primarily ancient Greek and Latin. Results from another series of questions in the survey corroborate this view. We applied the same approach in asking classics professors to identify the most important “domains of knowledge and scholarly activities” within the discipline of classics. From the following

The College of Wooster



list, we asked them to identify the five most important:

- ancient science, mathematics, and technology
- ancient politics, economics, and society
- ancient philosophy
- classical scholarship
- ancient literature
- ancient religion
- ancient art, architecture, and other forms of materials culture
- ancient history
- Latin language
- ancient music and dance
- contemporary significance of the classical tradition
- ancient Greek language

“Latin language,” “ancient Greek language,” and “ancient literature” emerged as the most important, followed by “ancient history” and the study of “ancient art, architecture, and other forms of material culture.”

This comes as no surprise, given the overall distribution of faculty by self-identified areas of expertise and published teaching schedules. Of the 248 classicists in our sample of sixty-nine departments at liberal arts colleges, 173 (70 percent) were primarily engaged in the study of the languages and literatures, twenty-six (10 percent) in ancient history, and thirty-seven (15 percent) in art and archaeology.

Students, too, seem to embrace the importance of the languages. In the course of the study, we interviewed forty-six students, of whom thirty-two were majors (nineteen women

and thirteen men). In response to our question, tell us about how you decided on your major? the most commonly cited reason (ten respondents) for settling on classics was the desire to acquire the languages and study the literature. “That’s actually sort of what got me into it,” one major noted; “I knew that I wanted to take Latin when I got here—and Greek. Partly that was informed by having read Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, because every so often in there he goes off on how his buddies in pubs start speaking in Greek or Latin. I definitely feel there’s a strong classic tradition of what it is to be well-educated.” In response to the question, tell us what you will get out of your major that students in other disciplines do not? a majority of classics students said that the study of the languages made their experiences unique among those of their peers. They tended to cite three primary reasons. First, it has a perceptible cognitive effect. One student reports:

As I’ve gone through my major, and gone through taking more of Greek and Latin, and some of my other coursework, I can tell I’ve got clarity of thought, my memory is better, those types of things. And I already had a good memory; I could remember the most ridiculous, strange facts ever. That was why I loved history, because it was just facts, and I could just memorize them and it was fun. But I can tell that my memory is that much better from having to sit and memorize verb paradigms, and declensions, and all of that. Second, it gives students a clearly defined sense of academic accomplishment. Here is how another student described her experience:

It has really given me confidence in what I can do. Like, if you have had a history degree or a literature degree, you’re like, “Oh, you know, oh that’s good.” But a classics degree? Like she said, reading Horace in Latin, for me reading Homer in Greek was really intense, and reading Herodotus, and being able to read these ancient authors in the original text, it just really gives you so much more confidence in how much you’ve learned and what you can do. I look back on Greek, and sometimes I think I’m not very good at it, but in class we’ll sit down with the *Anabasis*, and we go around in a circle and translate, and I’m like, “Wow, I really do know a lot more than I thought I knew.” Third, students believe that it makes them

more articulate speakers and writers of English, as one of our respondents explained, connecting the acquisition of language to critical thinking: “Learning Latin enables you to speak English better; it enables you to critically think in ways that you just don’t have the opportunity to do in other languages—it makes you a better linguist for sure.”

Returning again to the questions about the goals of liberal education, the other result of note was the absence of “synthesizing information” among the faculty’s list of top five outcomes. (It actually came in seventh, behind “developing the ability to formulate and solve problems.”) The value students and alumnae/alumni placed on that outcome may reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline, which was the second most common reason majors cited for studying classics (six respondents). One student commented: “I think that’s one of my favorite things; it’s comparable to being an English major, a history major, a language major, and a religion major. You get to do all of that with a specialized focus instead of doing one of those with a broad focus on the entire field.” The discrepancy on this point between the views of the faculty and the students, both current and former, may represent a variation on the issue of contextualization. While describing and even highlighting classics as a field of study that draws on a variety of disciplines, faculty members may assume that undergraduates will eventually learn on their own to see connections and effectively synthesize information from different domains. Consequently, students might recognize this as an important skill to develop at the same time as their faculty mentors take it for granted. This again illustrates the importance of helping students contextualize their efforts and successes within the discipline as well as in relationship to the overall goals of liberal education.

Concluding suggestions

As noted above, faculty mentors should provide a more complete framework for understanding how study in the major contributes to the overall process of gaining a liberal education. Of the 114 syllabi the students collected during this study, for instance, only

A majority of classics students said that the study of the languages made their experience unique

one specifically addressed how the topics of study for that course and the methods used fit within the objectives of the major and how that course related in its content and approach to other courses offered by the department. Although

it is often apparent to professors when students demonstrate the skills of analyzing information, synthesizing disparate types of data to formulate a problem and propose a solution, or effectively marshalling arguments to advocate for a particular perspective—all hallmarks of a liberal education—it is not always apparent to the students themselves. Here is where reflection on the part of the students and their faculty mentors may well represent the most important outcome of all.

Although the data assembled by the project provide, at best, a limited “snapshot” of classics as one of many contributing disciplines in the setting of liberal education, we hope it will provide a basis for further investigation and debate. The Center for Hellenic Studies will make the findings of the study available in greater detail on its Web site (chs.harvard.edu) and provide opportunities for faculty members to meet and discuss the methods, results, and suggestions. Readers may express their interest in this project as well as offer comments and observations by sending e-mail to outreach@chs.harvard.edu. □

REFERENCE

Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2007. *College learning for the new global century: A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

NOTE

1. Members of the team were Soo-Young Kim, Allie Marbry, Julia Draper, Morgan Pittman, Katherine Kern, Erik Erkkila, and Jonah Roth. The team wishes to thank the members of our advisory board: Georgia Nugent, Richard Detweiler, Jo Ellen Parker, and Rachele Brooks.

DAVID COLANDER AND KIMMARIE MCGOLDRICK

The Economics Major and Liberal Education

THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE of a liberal education, or an undergraduate major, depends far more on how the educational process influences students' passion for learning than it does on what specifically they learn. A successful liberal education creates a lifelong learner, and classroom instruction is as much a catalyst for education as it is the education itself. Because passion for learning carries over to other fields and areas, the catalyst function of education does not depend on content.

Academic departments tend to focus on both the need for depth in the field and the need for specialized training as a component of liberal education. The push for depth over breadth by disciplinary scholars is to be expected. Just as a Shakespeare scholar is unlikely to be passionate about teaching freshman composition, a scholar of classical game theory is unlikely to be passionate about teaching general economic principles within the context of an interdisciplinary consideration of broad themes. Because breadth is not usually associated with research passion by disciplinary specialists, and because a college is a collection of disciplinary specialists, breadth often gets shortchanged; it is interpreted as "superficial."

But in reality, breadth pertains to the nature of the questions asked. It involves asking questions that are unlikely to have definitive answers—"big-think" questions that challenge the foundations of disciplinary analysis. By contrast, depth involves asking smaller questions that can be answered—"little-think"

questions that, too often, involve an uncritical acceptance of the assumptions upon which research is built.

Questions and areas of study have two dimensions: a research dimension and a teaching dimension. The disciplinary nature of both graduate education and undergraduate college faculties leads to an emphasis on "research questions," which tend to be narrow and in-depth, and a de-emphasis on "teaching questions," which tend to involve greater breadth. Economics has its own distinctive set of teaching questions: Is capitalism preferable to socialism? What is the appropriate structure of an economy? Does the market alienate individuals from their true selves? Is consumer sovereignty acceptable? Do statistical significance tests appropriately measure significance? It is worthwhile to teach such "big-think" questions, but because they do not fit the disciplinary research focus of the profession, they tend not to be included in the economics major. This is regrettable, since struggling with "big-think" questions helps provoke a passion for learning in students and, hence, can be a catalyst for deeper student learning.

It is similarly worthwhile to expose students to longstanding debates within the field. For example, Marx considered the alienation created by the market to be a central problem of western societies; Hayek argued that the market was necessary to preserve individual freedom; and Alfred Marshall argued that activities determine wants and, thus, wants cannot be considered as primitives in economic analysis. Such debates are highly relevant for students to consider as they study economics within the context of a liberal education. But these kinds of debates are not actively engaged as part of cutting-edge research, which instead tends to focus either on narrow questions that can be resolved through statistical analysis or

Much more discussion is needed about the content and focus of the economics major as well as how that content is taught

DAVID COLANDER is *Christian A. Johnson Distinguished Professor of Economics at Middlebury College*, and KIMMARIE MCGOLDRICK is *professor of economics at the University of Richmond*.



on highly theoretical questions that exceed the level of undergraduate students.

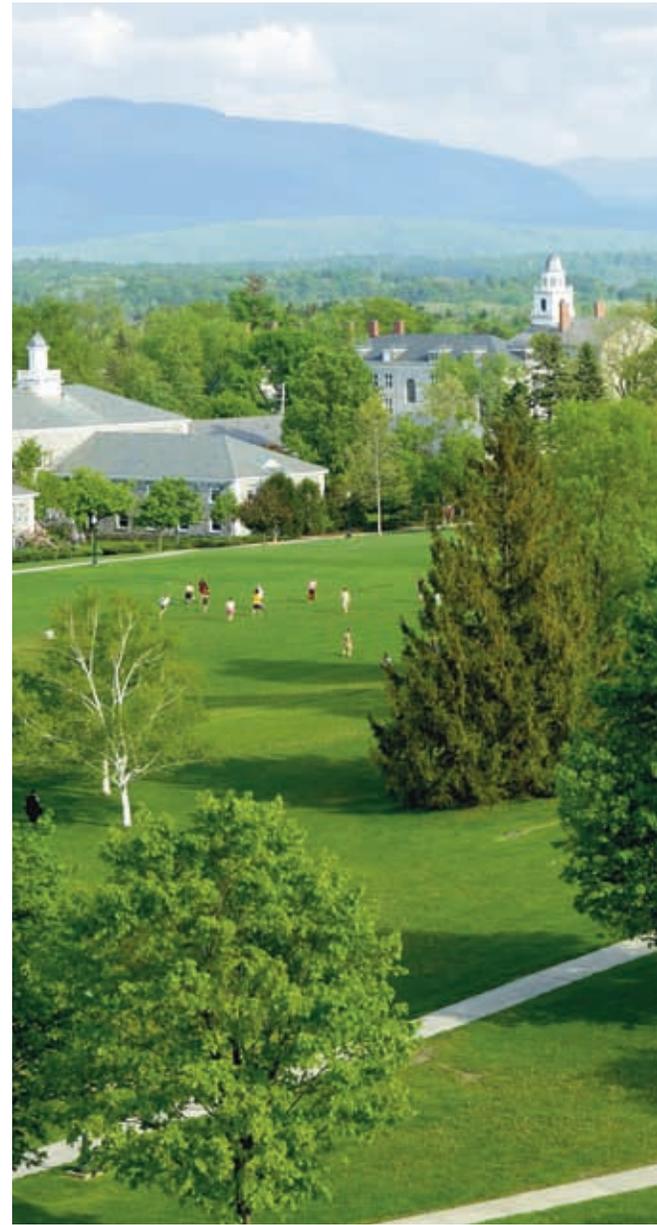
General education and the major

College education was once divided between general education, which was provided in the first two years, and the major, which was the focus of the last two years. The importance of the major has increased significantly, however, and this division is no longer reflected in the structure of undergraduate education today. Many students are now required to start their majors in the first year of college or, at the latest, in the second year. And too many faculty members are not directly concerned with achieving the overall goals of a liberal education, which they view as tangential to the disciplinary major. Few, if any, professors are devoted to teaching general education courses exclusively. Instead, these courses are provided by departments and often seen as a draw on the teaching resources of the major.

Instead of serving to strengthen liberal education by providing depth in one area, the undergraduate major has become more vocational. Viewed as preparation for graduate school, the disciplinary major channels passion for learning to a small group of future researchers and professors. Providing a liberal education and instilling a passion for learning in undergraduate students who do not wish to go on to graduate school is a secondary goal of teaching, and it is incorporated only to the degree that it fits the needs of the departmental major.

As the power bases for individual disciplines have been reinforced by faculty training and institutional structures, the power base for general education has shrunk. And as disciplinary majors have become more deeply entrenched, the disconnect between the major and the goals of liberal education has widened. The result is that often students with generalist interests are not provided with the catalyst for further learning and engagement, despite continual attempts by colleges and universities to achieve that end.

The freshman seminar, for example, was designed to achieve greater focus on communication and integrative skills as well as to provide students with more intimate contact with faculty early on. Math, science, and economics professors have little training in general writing and communication skills, yet they are expected to teach these skills in



freshman seminars. If economics professors succeed in instilling a passion for learning during the freshman seminar, it is due to their individual commitment to the ideals of such courses and their ability to draw on training beyond what they received in graduate school.

The role of graduate education

All this is not to say that undergraduate programs are devoid of professors committed to the ideals of liberal education. Just as study in the major is only a part of an undergraduate student's education, so too is graduate training only a part of a graduate student's education. Students with broad interests make it into



graduate school, and some make it through; others develop broad interests afterwards. But those who are most passionate about undergraduate teaching are unlikely to make it into a top graduate program in economics. In part, this is because the training offered by top graduate programs is unattractive to these potential graduate students. But even more, it is because these are not the type of students that graduate programs are looking for; training students to be good teachers is not what graduate programs in economics see as their goal. In lower-ranked graduate programs, the focus on training researchers as opposed to teachers is less pronounced, but it still exists—in part,

because these programs are staffed by graduates of the top programs.

The problem of the relationship between the major and liberal education does not derive solely from the structure of the major or the specific courses included as part of that structure. The specialized, disciplinary structure of graduate education in the United States also contributes to the problem. Graduate education is designed to produce cutting-edge researchers who may teach undergraduates as a sidelight. As graduate programs become more specialized and more focused on preparing researchers rather than teachers, and as research outlets also become more specialized,

the research and teaching focuses of the professoriate pull even harder in different directions.

The economics major and liberal education

The economics major includes technical aspects drawn from mathematics and the natural sciences as well as humanistic aspects related to history, philosophy, literature, political science, and public policy. Thus, in some ways, the problem of the relationship between liberal education and the economics major is a microcosm of the problem of the relationship between liberal education and the undergraduate curriculum as a whole.

Economics today neglects to foster certain liberal education outcomes on which it could, and once did, focus. Moral reasoning, for example, was once part of economics education but is no longer a focus of the discipline today. A recent survey of undergraduate economics majors found that only 21 percent believe that economics is highly successful at teaching moral reasoning (Jones et al. 2010). Similarly,

teaching students about “living with diversity” and, depending on how it is interpreted, providing “breadth of interest,” are not specific goals of the economics major.

The same holds true for the development of other skills associated with a liberal education. Economists are trained in specialized forms of critical thinking that focus on technical issues and analytics rather than on how to arrive at a reasoned judgment by considering all aspects of a problem. Economists are not especially known for their communication skills, and they receive little training in writing or communication while in graduate school. It is, therefore, unlikely that the economics major will be effective in teaching these skills. And indeed, in the survey cited above, only 28 percent of majors said that economics is highly successful in teaching communication skills.

An influential report on the purpose and structure of the undergraduate economics major helped establish, or at least codify, the general structure of the undergraduate economics



Middlebury College

major that almost all economics departments currently follow (Siegfried et al. 1991). The central goal of the major, according to the report, is to teach students to “think like an economist.” This goal—which encompasses deductive reasoning skills, decision-making techniques, understanding complex relationships, creativity, acquiring and using knowledge that cuts across disciplinary boundaries—overlaps significantly with the outcomes of a liberal education.

Teaching students to “think like an economist” is a relatively uncontroversial goal insofar as it allows each professor to think of the training they provide as, essentially, getting the student to think like him or herself. But the goal has been pushed further by some who favor teaching a particular set of proficiencies. For example, Hansen (2010) argues that the goal of the economics major should be to teach students to *act* like economists: “instructors want students to be able to demonstrate at various levels their ability to perform the various proficiencies, culminating at graduation with their ability to demonstrate mastery of every one of the proficiencies.” Almost everyone would agree that proficiencies should ground what is taught; the disagreement centers on how broadly or narrowly the proficiencies are defined. Should they be reflective of liberal education goals—for example, the ability to read, critically analyze, and write effectively—or should they instead be reflective of narrower skills that are more directly relevant to the field of economics, such as the ability to understanding opportunity cost, to run regressions and interpret “t” statistics, and to explain the connection between money supply and inflation?

Precisely what it means to “think like an economist” changes over time, mirroring changes in the training of economists. Through the 1960s, both graduate and undergraduate training was focused on broad-based skills that integrated critical thinking, historical knowledge, and statistical analysis. Since then, graduate training has become more technical, more reliant on mathematics and statistics. Initially there were debates within the field about this change, but technical mathematics and statistical training have won out. The reality today is that economics is a

Economics today neglects to foster certain liberal education outcomes on which it could, and once did, focus

highly technical field, and anyone who is not comfortable with high-level mathematics and statistics is not advised to pursue graduate work in the field. The focus on general economic problem solving within a broad setting—a fo-

cus that characterized economics training through the 1960s—is now greatly diminished. Economics professors today are more prepared to make important technical inputs into policy analysis than to develop policy questions within a broader framework. Graduate training is intended to develop technical expertise, not to focus on policy design or on the moral or ethical aspects of economic policy. Graduate students learn to translate problems into formal models and to study those problems empirically by using high-level statistical techniques.

The fact that “thinking like an economist” is now associated with the narrower, more technical proficiencies of the modern approach to the field does not mean that the economics major no longer contributes to the liberal education of students. It simply means that the economics major now contributes in a slightly different way. The typical economics professor is not well trained to guide students through moral reasoning or civic engagement activities, for example. His or her interests are likely to center on problems that are susceptible to formal modeling and statistical testing, rather than on policy questions that involve complicated ethical or moral issues. As a result, undergraduate education in economics now contributes more directly to the development of quantitative literacy. The role of the economics major is becoming more like the role currently played by mathematics and the sciences. Students round out their skill development through other components of their education.

The increasingly technical and specialized nature of the economics major needs to be kept in perspective. Relative to history, English, or the other social sciences, economics is indeed technical and specialized. But the same pressures for specialization are at work within those other fields as well. Relative to the undergraduate science majors, the economics major is nontechnical and general. The economics major also typically has far fewer required

courses than the science majors and, unlike most natural science majors, it is still designed for students who do not intend to continue their formal education beyond graduation.

Two distinct constituencies

Largely because of its connections to business, the undergraduate economics major has to satisfy two constituencies. The first is the very small group of students who intend to pursue graduate study in economics; professors of economics are well trained to teach these students. The second, much larger constituency is comprised of students who view the economics major either as a stepping stone to business and public policy, or simply as a foundation for a strong liberal education. Integrating the needs of these two distinct groups is a major problem for undergraduate economics faculty, and the decisions they make regarding how best to meet the needs of both constituencies will significantly influence the nature of the economics major in the future.

Students who perceive the economics major as a stepping stone and do not plan to pursue further study in the field—the second constituency—comprise the larger group. While 10 percent of economics majors consider going on to graduate school (Jones et al. 2010), the reality is that less than 2 percent actually do so—and an even smaller percentage complete it. Nonetheless, professors are often led

by their own interests and research focus to teach to the much smaller group. Current graduate training in economics is focused on preparing researchers who have a narrow focus and who avoid asking “big-think” questions. These graduates will determine the future of the economics profession, and their natural tendency will be to train majors in the same way in which they were themselves trained. It is likely that they will continue to design the major around, and focus their passion on, courses that prepare undergraduates for graduate school, rather than devote their time and passion to “generalist” courses.

Some undergraduate programs address the dual constituency by creating two separate tracks within the major. The mathematical or economic-science track is appropriate for those students intending to go on to graduate school in economics and for those interested in using economics to develop a quantitative foundation within the liberal arts. This group comprises approximately 20 to 40 percent of current economics majors. The general economics track is more relevant to applied policy and provides a combined humanistic and quantitative liberal arts foundation. Other programs leave the two constituencies integrated, and attempt to design a single approach to the major that caters to both groups of students. Regardless of the program format, however, the major curriculum is being populated with an increasing number of technical course offerings as younger, more technically trained economists replace older, more generally trained economists. In short, the economics major is becoming less appropriate for students interested either in business and public policy or in a combined humanistic and quantitative liberal arts foundation.

Economics faculty are teaching students to think like economists, but it is not clear that “thinking like an economist” is the appropriate educational goal for these generalist students. Instead, for them, the goal should be to develop their ability to use broader reasoning tools in ways that are consistent with the economic way of thinking. Ideally, by the time they graduate, undergraduate economics majors should be familiar with the broad outlines of the economic method and the technical tools used by economists. They should not think that the economic way of thinking is the only right way, however. They should also be familiar

About the Report

The American Economic Association (AEA) does not take formal positions on issues. Instead, members of AEA committees prepare reports that reflect their own positions, rather than those of the AEA itself. This practice allows authors more freedom to be controversial and helps generate discussion. When the AEA received a grant from the Teagle Foundation to investigate how the economics major and economics coursework taken by students in other majors can more effectively support the goals of a liberal education, the association assigned two members of its Committee on Economic Education to do the report; those members are identified here as the authors. The report generated much discussion within the economics profession, some of which is presented in other published versions of the report (Colander and McGoldrick 2009, 2010).

Recommendations

The authors issued a series of specific recommendations for improving the economics major. These can be found in the full report, which is available online at www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/publications.aspx.

with scientific and humanistic ways of thinking, and they should understand how, when combined with these other ways of thinking, the economic way of thinking can lead to a reasoned solution to a problem.

Conclusion

In order to enhance economic education in ways that are consistent with the liberal education perspective, the catalyst function of education needs to be supported more fully. Reports or mandates from above that tell professors to do something different from what they want to do will undermine their passion and, thus, the catalyst function of the education they provide. It is better to teach the “wrong” content passionately than to teach the “right” content perfunctorily. The content of what is taught will, and should, be determined by individual professors and schools. Ideally, of course, the “right” content will be taught passionately. But this is unlikely at present, if the goal is to prepare liberally educated students. The current structure of graduate programs and of colleges and universities themselves ensures that the content taught with passion is driven by narrow research interests rather than by general teaching priorities. Only major institutional change at both the graduate and undergraduate levels can affect that.

In the absence of such major institutional change, marginal improvements can be made by modifying incentives and institutions so that more emphasis is placed on pedagogy and teaching. While there is no one set of “best practices” in economics pedagogy that are especially suitable for a liberal education, there are better and worse practices. Such practices should be an important part of the regular discussion at any college or university.

The bottom line of this report is that if the economics major is to make the best possible contribution to the liberal education of undergraduate students, then much more discussion is needed about the content and focus of the economics major as well as how that content is taught. It is beyond the scope of this report to identify precisely what that “best contribution” may be. Positive change in any discipline does not come from the top down; it comes

The economics major is becoming less appropriate for students interested either in business and public policy or in a combined humanistic and quantitative liberal arts foundation

from the bottom up, and major change builds on the initiatives of individual schools. The goal of this report is to open up a conversation, rather than to generate a set of specific recommendations. There are many ways in which the economics major can contribute to the liberal education of students. Thus, there are many ways in which the major can be structured to promote this objective.

But the best economics major will not develop from bottom-up discussion unless departments are sufficiently concerned about the major and have appropriate incentives to ensure it contributes in the best way possible. We hope this report will help generate that concern. □

REFERENCES

- Colander, D., and K. McGoldrick. 2009. The economics major as part of a liberal education: The Teagle report. *American Economic Review* 99 (2).
- , eds. 2010. *Educating economists: The Teagle discussion on reevaluating the undergraduate economics major*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishers.
- Hansen, W. L. 2010. Reinvigorating liberal education with an expected proficiencies approach to the academic major. In *Educating economists: The Teagle discussion on reevaluating the undergraduate economics major*, eds. D. Colander and K. McGoldrick. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishers.
- Jones, S., E. Hoest, R. Fuld, M. Dahal, and D. Colander. 2010. What do economics majors think about the economics major? In *Educating economists: The Teagle discussion on reevaluating the undergraduate economics major*, eds. D. Colander and K. McGoldrick. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishers.
- Siegfried, J. J., R. L. Bartlett, W. L. Hansen, A. C. Kelley, D. N. McCloskey, and T. H. Tietenberg. 1991. The status and prospects of the economics major. *Journal of Economic Education* 22 (3): 197–224.

The English or Foreign Language Major and Liberal Education

Both the global economy and our ethnically diverse society need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, and histories of other cultures as well as their own

STUDY IN LANGUAGE, literature, and culture has long been a defining feature of education in the liberal arts. Speaking, reading, and writing have traditionally stood at the heart of education because the arts of language and the tools of literacy are key qualifications for full participation in social, political, economic, and cultural life. Today the hallmarks of a liberal education—communication, critical

analysis, and creativity—are more important than ever as prerequisites for success in life. A college education should develop students' abilities to think critically and analytically and to communicate knowledge and understanding effectively. The skills underlying these abilities require constant practice and should form the base of the undergraduate experience across all disciplines:

- to write clearly
- to speak articulately
- to read closely
- to evaluate and present evidence accurately
- to use quantitative data precisely
- to apply reasoning correctly
- to engage with artistic creation and expression imaginatively
- to work both independently and collaboratively

In the course of a college education, students should also develop historical and comparative perspectives by studying the development of societies, cultures, literatures, and philosophies over time and across multiple disciplinary approaches. To become informed global citizens, students need to meet the broad educational objectives that undergird liberal education:

- to engage with people across a range of languages, histories, traditions, and ways of seeing

- to experience people and places that are different and distant from those of their families or home communities
- to apply moral reasoning to ethical problems
- to understand environmental challenges

While literacy is the foundational core of all educational and scholarly projects, it is the particular focus of study in departments of language and literature, and the twenty-first-century knowledge commons puts specific forms of literacy at a premium: the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with others through *cross-cultural literacy*, to work with new forms of media through *technological literacy*, to understand language and culture in context through *historical literacy*, and to analyze, organize, and make sense of information through *information literacy*.

The Modern Language Association recommends an approach to structuring baccalaureate degree programs in English and other languages that combines four constitutional elements: (1) a coherent program of study; (2) teamwork among the instructional staff members; (3) interdepartmental cooperative teaching; and (4) empirical research to assess the successes and shortcomings of the program. At once structured and flexible, the major in language and literature should follow an integrative model that is responsive to the demands of technological innovation and the realities of globalized societies. The major also needs to accommodate the explosion of disciplinary knowledge that, in language and literature as in other fields of study, creates daunting challenges while giving rise to new opportunities. In this context, collaborative teamwork among faculty members is required to give the major coherence and structure, and administrative



Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is an initiative that champions the value of a liberal education—for individual students and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality. The initiative focuses campus practice on fostering essential learning outcomes for all students, whatever their chosen field of study.

LEAP is AAC&U's primary vehicle for advancing and communicating about the importance of undergraduate liberal education for all students. LEAP seeks to engage the public with core questions about what really matters in college, to give students a compass to guide their learning, and to make a set of essential learning outcomes the preferred framework for educational excellence, assessment of learning, and new alignments between school and college.

More information about the LEAP initiative is available online at www.aacu.org/leap.

THE ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

support is required to sustain points of articulation with other fields of study. The results of program changes need to be documented and evaluated empirically, through the adoption of outcome measurements.

The major's foundation

Language and literature need to remain at the center of what departments of English and foreign languages do. Although intrinsically linked, reading and writing are not natural or instinctive skills; they are contingent on a lengthy learning process in which they are practiced as an interrelated, complementary pair. In exercising their minds to achieve literacy, students learn to think abstractly. Recent work in neuroscience has made it clear that the brain is plastic and dynamic, and language is the most powerful means of forging links between existing neuronal maps and—especially important—for creating new ones. Contrary to popular misconception, the possibilities for learning languages are not confined to childhood, but rather persist into adulthood.

The role of literature needs to be emphasized. Sustained, deep engagements with literary works and literary language open perceptions of structure, texture, and the layering of meanings that challenge superficial comprehension, expand understanding, and hone analytic skills. The literary object offers itself to observation and deciphering through narrative techniques, internal clues, and external references that beckon the curiosity and intelligence of readers. As readers become cognizant of the complexities of the linguistic system, they become mindful of language and of languages as evolving historical artifacts and institutions that are intricately bound up with the cultures they express. Students also become sensitive to narrative strategies, verbal manipulations, and linguistic seductions—in short, to communication in all its powers and limitations.

While we advocate incorporating into the major the study of a variety of texts, we insist that the most beneficial among these are literary works. Our cybernetic world has brought us speed and ease of information retrieval; even where the screen has replaced paper, however, language still remains the main mode of communication. Those who learn to read slowly and carefully and to write clearly and precisely will also acquire the nimbleness and visual



perceptions associated with working in an electronic environment.

In postsecondary education, most students gain the riches that will be their intellectual capital for the rest of their lives. Both the global economy and our ethnically diverse society need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, and histories of other cultures as well as their own. The great strength of the humanities has always been its insistence on the value of considering the past, of examining our accomplishments and failures, and of teaching the patience, knowledge, and craft required to move beyond our insular selves. Delving into other languages and learning to read complex literary texts rank among the most powerful means available for accomplishing these goals of liberal education and contributing to students' personal and intellectual development.

Literary scholars explore how storytelling plays essential roles in all kinds of human comprehension. As students of literature learn about literary structure and form and the meanings of departures from established forms, they acquire the basic building blocks of understanding. At the same time, literature supplies an imaginative context through

which readers gain insight into politics, history, society, emotion, and the interior life. Thus close reading of literary texts develops important analytic and interpretive skills that play central roles in complex human enterprises. What accomplished readers do with stories found in books—inhabit them, accept them provisionally as real, act according to their rules, tolerate their ambiguities, see their events from multiple and contradictory points of view, experience their bliss—informs what they can do with stories in the world at large.

The study of language and literature provides special contexts for developing advanced skills in effective written and spoken communication—skills that are applicable in any profession that depends on writing and working with others. The knowledge and skills these studies develop also hold value in the realm of participatory democracy, where the ability to understand and communicate how ideas about process and policy have been or should be framed are crucial. No consensus or majority is gained without dialogue. In the course of their education, language and literature majors attain proficiencies that make them prime candidates for positions that require excellent communication skills.

De Anza College



The integrative major

The requirements for a major should form a series of course options that combine to fulfill curricular objectives. The aim should be to develop students' linguistic abilities, acquaint students with representative cultural examples through a designated body of works, and engage them with specific concepts, ideas, issues, cultural traditions, and traditions of inquiry. In addition to dispensing knowledge of the field, the course of study in English and other modern languages should also make improving writing and analytic skills two of its central tasks. Departments should conceive of the major with a

focus on three objectives: (1) an articulate sense of the scope of knowledge and kinds of inquiries characteristic of language and literature; (2) competencies in well-defined, measurable skill sets; and (3) structures that support a satisfying awareness of progression in knowledge and skill from earlier to more advanced parts of the program.

The curriculum of a major should present an integrated, progressive course of study with articulated goals for each course. Students should be able to enroll in courses that offer a clear sense of sequence, that move from less to more complex analytic projects, and that build



on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired. They should be aware of the goals of each course and the aims of the major. Steady progress toward advanced proficiency in the language of the major is a primary objective. The formal study of language should be inherent to all courses.

Within the larger institution, the department should create for its students a social community that provides continuous support and leads to a progressive understanding of the particularities of the specific language, literature, and culture being studied. The importance of study abroad is well established in

this respect, since even a prolonged stay in an English-speaking country will reveal to students how one is always part of a wider culture that needs to be studied and learned.

All teaching faculty members, regardless of rank and status, are stakeholders in the educational mission of the department, and all should be involved in the organization of the curriculum. Although the curriculum may in part reflect the research interests of faculty members, the formulation of a major program should be a collaborative educational project that first and foremost addresses the needs of the students. Courses should be designed to teach specific content in conjunction with developing specific abilities. During their years of study, students should confront texts from popular culture to literary masterpieces and from performance arts to visual images; they should also be taught the basic methodological and disciplinary approaches to these different media. Because the writing and reading skills developed in language departments extend to other disciplines, faculty members from all language departments, not just from English, should be engaged in general education. Moreover, to attract students to a major, departments should showcase their best and most experienced professorial-rank faculty members in general education courses and not reserve them for specialized courses only. Withholding professorial-rank faculty members from general education courses accentuates the disparity between non-tenure-line faculty members (including graduate assistants) who often teach first-year and general education courses and tenure-line professors who offer students a more integrated educational experience.

Revised historical understandings, new fields of scholarly inquiry, the effects of globalization, the proliferation of new media, vocational pressures on undergraduates, and professional pressures on faculty members and graduate students bring new challenges to the existing structures of higher education. The rise of digital media has ushered in new paths to the pursuit and attainment of knowledge, and universities and colleges need to adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by this technological revolution. The curriculum today faces multiple pressures: to speed up instruction, expand coverage, investigate new interests, use the resources provided by

developing media, and meet benchmarks of achievement. But departments should resist the impulse to increase coverage at the expense of intensive engagement with great and complex works of literature. Most departments will feature courses that center on nonliterary texts, including but not limited to newspapers; film, digital, and other nonprint or print-plus media; and documents from law, medicine, and other professions. English and other language departments thus place their disciplinary specialty into a broader, extradepartmental framework from the outset of learning. They take care to create educational experiences that are effective

Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major

At the end of the 1980s, the Association of American Colleges (as AAC&U was then known) initiated and led a three-year review of liberal arts and sciences majors within the context of liberal education. The results were presented as a series of task force reports on twelve undergraduate majors: biology, economics, history, interdisciplinary studies, mathematics, philosophy, physics, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, and women's studies. AAC&U published abridgments of the reports in *Liberal Learning and the Arts and Sciences Major: Reports from the Fields* (1990).

The Project on Liberal Learning, Study-in-depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major was planned and implemented in cooperation with twelve learned societies: the American Academy of Religion, the American Association of Physics Teachers, the American Economics Association, the American Historical Association, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the American Philosophical Association, the American Political Science Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, the Mathematical Association of America, the National Women's Studies Association, and the Society for Values in Higher Education. Each society considered its own major in relation to concerns and questions addressed across the entire project. The participating learned societies published the unabridged versions of the individual reports.

both for students who plan immediately to enter the workforce and for students who wish to go on to graduate school.

Both categories of undergraduates will benefit from greater curricular connection between the study of literature and either second language acquisition or English composition. The study of language should be integral to the study of literature and should link reading and progress in reading to writing and progress in writing. Literature students would improve their reading and writing skills if literature and composition courses were more closely connected. Students of language would greatly profit from the challenges presented by literary works in addition to reading texts focusing on current events and popular culture.

English and other language and literature programs need to offer a variety of ways for students to progress in their knowledge of traditions, themes, periods, and cultures so that programs of study achieve depth and coherence. In every culture, literary studies are taught and learned through distinctive lenses, and we need to bring majors into the most enlivening past and present critical conversations in the literary fields. As the trend toward involving undergraduates in research suggests, it is important to engage students with faculty scholarly interests and the issues and arguments debated in the discipline. Teaching students the vocabulary of disciplinary argument and inquiry is essential. Although the specifics of particular arguments might be forgotten, the broader lesson of how arguments are conducted remains.

Furthermore, in an international context, curricula need to be designed to enhance students' knowledge of the methodologies and practices of disciplines in other countries and to expand their understanding of cross-cultural variables. Departments should therefore encourage the integration of languages other than English in courses and majors across the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. English and other modern language departments should support study abroad and be actively involved in such programs as "Languages across the Curriculum" in ways that enrich those programs' intercultural and international content.

Speaking a second language does not necessarily make one a sophisticated citizen of the contemporary world. A curriculum rich in



international politics and economics, comparative religion, and discrete or specific social histories could have at least as compelling a claim to preparing citizens. While reading world literature in translation can broaden understanding of other cultures, translations do not necessarily induce deep or subtle sensibilities toward the stranger within our community or far distant from our shores. Insofar as we use translations to engage students with global literatures and cultures, we should make sure that translation itself is rendered visible and made a pedagogical tool that points students to other languages and cultures.

To develop insightful and sensitive cultural interpreters, the English or foreign language major from start to finish should be composed of courses that are intellectually stimulating, rich in the knowledge transmitted, and demanding in the oral and written presentation of arguments. Accordingly, students who major in foreign languages should be required to have a good command of English and some knowledge of English and American literature; likewise, English majors should be required to learn another language and become familiar with literature in another language. Reaching advanced literacy and linguistic levels should

be the expected outcome for all language majors, and student achievement should be formally assessed.

The pedagogical emphasis in recent decades on language for communication seems sometimes to entail the willingness to accept approximations of pronunciation, grammar, and syntax, so long as the intended idea is more or less conveyed. But for undergraduate language majors, in addition to basic communicative skills, other concepts should also be emphasized, including the aesthetics of language, the correspondence between sharpness of thought and aptness of expression, and the usefulness of language for manipulating abstract ideas and understanding complex issues. The major should instill the value of intellectual and linguistic accomplishment, rather than functionality, and should stress language and literature as key to understanding human achievement.

A major in language and literature should offer students the opportunity to acquire tools and hone skills that expand their intellectual capacities, enhance their personal well-being, and appropriately serve their professional ambitions. To serve these goals, the curriculum of the major should include

- courses that develop literacies in reading and writing;
- at least one course devoted to slow reading and in-depth study of an artistically great work or works;
- at least one small seminar to develop individuals' capacities to their fullest;
- at least one team-taught or interdisciplinary class;

Teagle Working Group Members

The Modern Language Association (MLA) Working Group included the following members: Rita Charon, Columbia University; Carol T. Christ, Smith College; Gerald Graff, University of Illinois, Chicago; Marshall W. Gregory, Butler University; Michael Holquist (chair), Yale University; David B. Marshall, University of California, Santa Barbara; Imani Perry, Rutgers Law School, Camden; Randolph D. Pope, University of Virginia; Geneva Smitherman, Michigan State University; David M. Steiner, Hunter College, City University of New York; Joan Hinde Stewart, Hamilton College; Jenifer K. Ward, Cornish College of the Arts; Rosemary G. Feal, MLA; Nelly Furman, MLA and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages; and David Laurence, MLA and the Association of Departments of English.

- a course on disciplinary issues and scholarly debates;
- the opportunity to study abroad.

The major's place in the academy today

Discussions of the declining status of the humanities and liberal arts in the changing landscape of American higher education generate anguish, but personal testimony and apocalyptic scenarios often substitute for research and historical analysis. The time has come for concerted thought at the level of local faculties and departments about how to organize programs of study and itineraries of student course taking to retrieve the power and interest of academic study in language and literature.

Institutions of higher education differ in their goals and missions, their size, the special strength of their faculties, and the composition of their student bodies. Moreover, majors leading to a bachelor's degree in English or a foreign language differ in literary, historical, and cultural content. Thus curricular models for the major have to be adaptable to objectives and possibilities that vary from institution to institution and from department to department.

Literary studies have properly freed themselves from a knowledge base adapted to the structural constraints of credit hours and semesters through devices such as a fixed, standard set of canonical or representative works. But as specialized inquiry and scholarship have progressed to produce a more realistic understanding of the total field of symbolic action, the problem of a knowledge base has not gone away. Faculty members in the field have mostly sought to avoid the question of how curricula represent a knowledge base through which newcomers—those who do not know what they do not know—put themselves in a position to enter the field, learn, and progress.

Even at the level of subspecialization, the materials meriting disciplinary attention have accumulated to an extent quantitatively beyond the grasp of any single student or scholar. The explosion of knowledge at the level of the field as a whole leads to a corresponding contraction at the level of the individual member of the field. Only as teams working collaboratively can faculties purposefully shape programs of study across the small number of courses and semesters available for an undergraduate major. This is the great challenge and opportunity: only departments

that can rely on enough noncontingent faculty members and on sustained resources can offer the curricular programs that best serve students and the academic community. It is hard to imagine a structural problem greater than the one we face today, insofar as the composition of the academic workforce is concerned.

A singular aspect of the study of language and literature is that it imparts cognitive skills and knowledge that cut across boundaries separating departments and the languages, literatures, and cultures taught in them. Students trained in one national or community-based culture acquire knowledge and abilities in reading, writing, and communication that extend to other languages. But the synergetic character of study in language and literature remains abstract unless actualized through student experience in courses that cut across departmental and language boundaries. The mission statements and strategic planning documents of many institutions make prominent mention of interdepartmental initiatives, inter- or cross-disciplinarity, and collaboration. Interpretation, translation, and cross-cultural communication are areas of inquiry that reside in language and literature departments and also form part of the bedrock of liberal education.

In our intellectual and theoretical work in language and literature departments, we articulate the value of crossing boundaries, traversing borders, and interrogating the intersections between our respective fields. However, the systems and structures of our institutions seldom reflect or support these intellectual commitments. If we wish to align the goals of our departmental majors with the goals of general education, we must make it structurally possible to realize that alignment. Institutions need to invest in the interdisciplinary capacities of their faculty members through support of team teaching and faculty development. Departments need to see the creative advantages of loosening their hold on curricular property, and faculty members need to be acculturated to the broad mission of their college or university.

As knowledge expands, programs of study proliferate and course options multiply;

**Only departments
that can rely on
enough noncontingent
faculty members
and on
sustained resources
can offer the
curricular programs
that best serve
students and the
academic community**

students today have more choices than ever before. In addition, as the academy becomes more responsive to the world outside, new pressures are put on departments and students to develop skills and reach benchmarks of achievement within four years. Increasing internationalization results in greater value being placed on learning languages and knowing world cultures.

But in the American educational system multilingualism and multiculturalism have not yet attained the recognition commensurate with the needs created by world developments, nor have they been fully recognized for their reach in enhancing intellectual abilities. And yet those responsible for programs in language and literature know that the skills they teach are among the most transferable. They are also the purveyors of linguistic, literary, and cultural contents that transmit cultural specificities and differences, historical information, aesthetic appreciation, and, with the possibility of self-knowledge, the impulse to reach out to others and learn the meaning of ethics.

A mandate for the future

We are committed to the notion that all students who major in our departments should know English and at least one other language. This is a radical stance, and it is not one with which students—or faculty members—can always comply with ease. Nonetheless, our political and social lives are not “English only,” domestically or internationally. The value of fluency in multiple languages cannot be overstated in the twenty-first century, when the emergent conditions of life bring more of us more often into circumstances that, on the one hand, ask us to travel through the complex terrain of a globalized economy and, on the other, bring far-flung local parochialisms to our doors through the vastly expanded reach of new communication technologies. Students who study languages other than English are achieving not merely formal communication but also sophistication with the nuances of culture—both in the sense of culture as art, music, and poetics and the broader sense of culture as a way of life. □

THE NATIONAL HISTORY CENTER

The History Major and Liberal Education

ALL DISCIPLINES and fields have something important to contribute to liberal learning. History, however, provides something distinctive. This contribution can be enhanced by a more explicit understanding of the relationship between the history major and the broader goals and processes of liberal learning, and

through consideration of that relationship in

discussions about the curriculum. History as a subject stands as the *domain* of the major; this report is intended to aid reflection on the *objectives* or the educational goals of the major. How does the study of history contribute to liberal learning as a basis for a lifelong engagement with ideas and civic culture?

Historical content

All humanities disciplines explore aspects of the past and its meaning. History stands out as the study of the past itself, an attempt to understand differences associated with temporality and to explain and conceptualize change over time based on evidence that survives. History is not, to cite the example given by the famous French historian Marc Bloch, simply the reporting of events (or, phrased less felicitously but more famously by Henry Ford, “one damned thing after another”). History education begins with a student learning that without analysis, explanation, or interpretation, knowledge of the past is not yet history. In teaching history we do much more than simply tell students “the way things were.” We introduce them to divergent historical interpretations and primary sources and teach them a set of methods for attempting to explain and understand no matter what kind of evidence is placed in

front of them. The underlying skill is a double one: the capacity to sift through masses of information and determine what matters, and a capacity for closely reading various texts. Each of these is crucial in contemporary society, where anyone with Internet access and a bit of curiosity is likely to confront information overload.

The study of history and the appreciation it brings of the differentness of the past also offers students important perspectives on their own identity and on the present. History requires us to think outside of our own experiences in time and place, and thus fosters empathetic thinking, greater appreciation of diversity, and understanding of the relationship between context and judgment. Furthermore, it offers perspective on the present, helping situate it in a longer stream of time and complicate simplistic understandings of present issues. Historical perspective stimulates a more nuanced and often critical approach to cause and effect, and conventional wisdoms generated by “natural” categories inherited from the past.

What the discipline of history has to offer goes far beyond the “historical turn” in other disciplines, which usually means little more than longitudinal perspective. History is a mode of analysis of contingency—it is not inevitable that we are what we are; or, where we are. Nor even that we were what we were or where we were. Neither stasis nor change can be taken for granted, and both emanate from both process and agency. History is about taking advantage of and making sense of an open-ended world of evidence, which assists the historically educated in living on the edge

How does the study of history contribute to liberal learning as a basis for a lifelong engagement with ideas and civic culture?



De Anza College



of open possibilities. What could be more important in the twenty-first century?

Historians' disagreements about the past are matched by their diverse perspectives on the proper scope of the major curriculum. The traditional view has emphasized coverage (that is, breadth over depth) and organized historical knowledge according to space and time—which usually meant by geography, national or political boundaries, and chronological period. More recently, however, historians have begun to favor in-depth analysis, have moved to transnational or thematic categories, and have begun to explore the possibilities for “world history”—which, among other things, has challenged the privileging of Western (and especially American) history in the

undergraduate curriculum. The relation between depth and breadth has been recalibrated in a way that enriches the discipline. Happily, we are finding that enrollment in non-Western survey courses is frequently greater than that in U.S. and European history, indicating that history is educating for a global experience and cosmopolitanism in a way that most other disciplines are not.

History has always been a culturally pluralistic discipline. Almost every history major is required to study more than one geographical area of the world and more than one chronological era. An emphasis on globalization has added the awareness of linkages and interrelationships across historical time and place. These changes have nourished a healthy inclination toward problem orientation in the organization of courses and teaching categories. But we do seem to be moving somewhat from the classic methodological categories (political history, economic history, social history, intellectual history) to categories of people and places (African American history, rural history, urban history, gender history, etc.). This has the great advantage of orienting the field more closely to the interests of students (and faculty) and to the more obvious aspects of human experience, but it might also risk the loss of a synthetic understanding of the past. It is possible that current formal subject-matter categories, whether demographic or spatial, nurture a tendency to study ourselves as historical subjects. But one of the great virtues of historical thinking, especially as part of the wider enterprise of liberal learning, is the analytical imperative to step outside oneself.

History's disciplinary inclination to distance us from our own experience and sensibilities and to engage the differentness of other people, places, and especially times, requires students to approach information and important questions in much the same way we hope they will approach civic life. It is about problem solving within a context, about gathering evidence from likely and unlikely sources, about how evidence from different sources fits together to make a picture of what happened or did not happen. It is about understanding that what happened might be viewed differently depending on whose viewpoint we take. It requires determination of how causes interrelate with one another, rather than a search for a single causal factor. Historians monitor how

individual efforts add up to a whole. They consider how the resistance of those who are not necessarily empowered can change the course of affairs. Unlike almost all other disciplines, history is a catholic field in which methodologies are chosen to solve problems, rather than problems being selected to test methodologies. History is inherently a multidisciplinary field and one in which inquiry begins with the problem and the historical context, not the discipline or dominant theory.

Historical skills

What about historical skills apart from content? The first need is to distinguish disciplinary skills from more general liberal learning skills (critical thinking, clarity of expression in speaking and writing, reading comprehension, quantitative literacy, the ability to organize facts and ideas, argumentation, and the like), and perhaps also from related field skills in the humanities and social sciences. We are especially interested in history's contribution to what William James, in his essay on "The Responsibility of the College Bred," called the virtues of "discrimination" (what these days would probably be termed "judgment"): the capacity to sift through information, to distinguish between the serious and the unserious, knowledge and myth, right and wrong. This is the highest order of the liberal learning skills and it lies at the heart of historical work.

Undergraduate history courses are rarely dominated by discussions of theory and methodology. Instead historians allocate more class time to an exploration of what happened in the past, how we know that it happened, and how that knowledge varies as observers' viewpoints shift. Historical study requires refined skills that enable us to solve problems by discovering information and evaluating written or material evidence to create order out of disorder. History is, in addition, a field mostly committed to the narrative form—it is the study of change over time, necessitating longitudinal analysis and generally organizing events and ideas along a timeline and through storytelling of some kind. It therefore requires distinctive forms of literary expression.

History also places a premium on the capacity for synthesis, which is how historians ordi-

We need to ask not only how history contributes to liberal learning, but also how ideas about liberal learning should affect the history major

narily make sense out of disparate patterns of evidence. It combines close examination and analysis of evidence with largeness of context and scope. Hence a history major offers the opportunity to bring together the several disciplines that the student has studied in order to address historical questions.

History values and rewards foreign language competency, since students benefit from the opportunity to explore texts in their original languages. But history also rewards quantitative analysis and the capacity to work with non-verbal data (image, sound, material culture). Above all, the study of history teaches a holistic approach to understanding that distinguishes it, in particular, from other social sciences.

History and liberal learning

The turn to broadly based social history in the last generation means that history as it is now frequently taught touches almost every aspect of life and draws on materials from many disciplines. History is inherently the study of how societies are constituted, and how people conduct themselves in society, always in a chronological perspective—and recognizing that these things change over time.

If history is taught well, students will understand these processes in part by reference to their own life experiences, while at the same time learning the importance of placing any life experience in the context of time and place, and recognizing the multiple perspectives present in any social situation. Ideally, they will bring their capacity for historical understanding to bear on their own lives and the societies in which they live, a goal that suggests the desirability of complementing our global emphasis with an orientation toward the local. History also teaches and facilitates empathetic skills, in that understanding an event requires trying to stand in the shoes of various historical actors, a practice that exercises and extends the social imagination. To the extent that we require students to discuss, write, get feedback on their writing, analyze and synthesize in papers and examinations, and work with scholars through difficult problems in classes and assignments, we are training them in the life skills of liberal learning and educated citizenship.

We need to ask not only how history contributes to liberal learning, but also how ideas about liberal learning should affect the history major. To the extent that liberal learning moves a student from content to cognition, history can play a useful and perhaps major role in liberal learning. The field of cognitive psychology has made it clear that the most effective learning at any stage of education is active learning, and for some time historians have oriented their teaching to the cognitive process, stressing the student's acquisition of "historical understanding" or "habits of historical thinking" through active learning, rather than merely reproducing facts or descriptive formulae. It is not enough, for example, to understand and remember a body of historical evidence; the student must learn to use that evidence to construct a historical argument.

History and broader learning outcomes

The single most important contribution that training in history can make to the liberal learning of undergraduates is to help students contextualize knowledge, offering an antidote to naive presentism. Few historians would be so instrumentalist as to suggest that those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it. But most would agree that the historically uninformed citizen would be severely hampered in making sound judgments about current events and future policies. This pertains without respect to the particular historical narratives the student (or former student) is most familiar with, since he or she should have derived from a sound historical education a general method for situating the evaluation of behavior in time and place.

It is tempting to argue that the study of history prepares students to make better ethical judgments and inculcates in them a heightened sense of social and political responsibility. This will doubtless be true of some approaches to history and the teaching of history, especially in their emphasis on empathetic skills and on the question of how context in the past affects judgment in the present—a crucial concept in any discussion of moral relativism. It seems likely, however, that the possibilities for historians to produce such learning are no better than those for teachers in other fields of the humanities and social sciences—though the historian's emphasis on the posing of questions does often stimulate the articulation of moral



and ethical issues on the part of students. We have come a long way, thankfully, from the times at which historians were expected to teach specific moral lessons (Christian history, Whig history), and no responsible scholar wants to retrace those steps today. Still, for the talented and committed history teacher, the opportunity to engage undergraduates thoughtfully with ethical and political dilemmas is available, appealing, and feasible.



Learning history involves the cultivation of capacities for making judgments about historical ideas, events, and actors. These capacities should carry over to judgments about contemporary life. Like other disciplines, history has its own standards and ethical codes, and history major curricula that include some engagement with issues of judgment are most likely to generate thinking about the ways in which such codes affect practice.

The college history teacher

The American Historical Association recently surveyed history doctoral programs, and the results make clear that graduate faculty are not meeting their responsibility to prepare their students for careers as teachers. The larger challenge is to recommit postsecondary faculty to their teaching mission. But the problem is general in that doctoral students are socialized to focus on disciplinary development

and research, which are only partial aspects of the profession. Teaching in classrooms and beyond them is also part of professionalism in history, as is an understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Generalizations about teaching and learning across the vast and diverse institutional expanse of American higher education require considerable qualification. Neither our observations nor our recommendations, therefore, will apply uniformly across all history departments. In general, however, history teachers can and should train their students in all of the liberal learning competencies. Departments need to be sure that faculty members are sufficiently skilled to provide such instruction—and that they actually do so. Some of this professional education could come from outside the department, but the key question is whether teaching as a profession can be a part of routine graduate education and acculturation.

We also need to consider how new PhDs are, or are not, encouraged to think of themselves as members of a college faculty, rather than mostly a history department. This may be less an issue of graduate education than new faculty orientation, and it also will nudge into the tenure system. Currently a new faculty member can assume that tenure exists mostly within the context of the department; one's role as a member of a larger faculty is virtually irrelevant.

Teagle Working Group Members

The National History Center (NHC) Working Group included the following members: Joyce Appleby, University of California, Los Angeles; Thomas Bender, New York University; Constance H. Berman, University of Iowa; Cheryl Greenberg, Trinity College (CT); James R. Grossman (coprincipal investigator), Newberry Library; Stanley N. Katz (coprincipal investigator), Princeton University; Nicholas Lemann, Columbia University; Carol Geary Schneider, Association of American Colleges and Universities; John H. Morrow, Jr., University of Georgia; Richard P. Saller, Stanford University; Rayman L. Solomon, Rutgers University School of Law, Camden; Tracy Steffes, Brown University; John A. Wertman, University of Virginia Medical Center.

Working Group Recommendations

As part of the Teagle Foundation initiative on the relationship between the disciplines and undergraduate liberal education, the National History Center Working Group issued a series of specific recommendations for improving the history major. The recommendations can be found in the full report of the working group, which is available online at www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/publications.aspx.

Even more of our majors—especially those in public, comprehensive universities—will become educators in precollegiate classrooms. The different needs of these majors can generate tensions between the imperatives of content and pedagogy, leaving little room in a crowded agenda for seemingly less practical abstractions. Yet the discourse of liberal education might offer a middle ground in that tension, a common terrain that can nurture historical learning and habits of mind necessary to good teaching at any level. And since many students moving toward a career in teaching will not remain in the classroom for their adult lives, a history major oriented as much toward liberal education as teacher education will stand them in good stead.

Assessment

Perhaps the most challenging problem that confronts history as an approach to liberal learning is that of assessment. The assessment of history majors usually occurs in individual classrooms, where it is conducted by history faculty who design assessments to measure the particular content and skills goals of each course, capstone seminar, or project. Faculty usually mix a variety of assessment tools in order to measure student mastery of important historical skills and knowledge. We can even move beyond the individual course to measure how much “history” a student has learned, or at least absorbed, over the course of the major. But we do not know how best to assess the value of the major to the student's liberal education. With pressure from the federal government, foundations, state governments, and others to generate measures of effectiveness, we cannot ignore this imperative. The challenge is to design assessments that relate to the desired outcomes of a liberal education.

In K–12 education, history assessment has often been viewed as a question of which “facts” and topics all students should learn. At times, epitomized by the ongoing controversy over national history standards, this discussion has become embroiled in political conflict over which subjects, interpretations, and overall narratives should be privileged and whether the national narrative should be celebratory or critical. To the extent that history faculty in universities desire to articulate knowledge that they believe should be common to all history majors, they will face similar

**The challenge
is to design
assessments that
relate to the
desired outcomes of
a liberal education**

debates over what content to require and measure. However, given disagreements among faculty over the desirability and feasibility of privileging particular historical content and the strong emphasis on historical thinking skills and methods in the collegiate study of history, it seems more likely that the chief issue for history assessment in higher education will be how to develop sophisticated methods that assess learning outcomes without being so reductionist as to measure solely low-order skills.

These assessment methods are likely to draw upon a set of existing tools, including portfolios, comparisons of student knowledge in gateway and capstone courses, and senior comprehensive examinations. But each of these constitutes, in a way, a *formative* assessment—a measure of progress during the process itself. *Summative* assessment—a measure of the effectiveness of the process—is likely to require exploration into the life histories of our majors. If liberal education is, for example, the fostering of an attitude toward lifelong learning, we need to make it clear that assessment takes place long after our students walk off the stage with their diplomas.

Beginning with a strong definition of desired outcomes we can move toward meaningful assessment of what history a graduating major should know, and how that knowledge contributes to a liberal education. What matters in the latter context are the goals we share with other disciplines: critical thinking, problem solving, critical reading of all kinds of texts (written, numerical, visual), communications skills (writing and speaking), and global awareness. The basic historical skills transfer to a variety of occupations, but these shared goals are important for the development of an enlightened citizenry. They are essential for the exercise of political life in a democracy. At the very least, for example, everyone needs to know how to evaluate a newspaper account or a blog.

Do we know how to assess these broader historical learning outcomes? It is clear that thinking about the history major as an aspect of liberal learning will help us in the construction of assessment tools that are not merely tests of content knowledge, but this is a journey upon which higher education has only begun to set out. The challenge for historians is to plot

the course of our discipline in our participation in this journey. If we do not define the desired outcomes, participate in conversations about how to measure the major's relationship to those outcomes, and help to formulate the parameters

of assessment, we will find our work assessed by people who do not completely understand it.

Conclusion

Much needs to be done to improve the quality of history education, both for disciplinary and for liberal learning purposes. We need to know more about the prior knowledge that students entering the major have acquired through their precollegiate or general education. The sequencing of history education deserves more thought, as does the role of study abroad and the potential of history as a form of experiential education that takes place as much outside the classroom as in it. And we surely need to make better use of information technology in our teaching and in the opportunities for student learning.

The issue of desired historical and liberal learning outcomes should be revisited by history faculty regularly, and we encourage colleges and universities to provide the resources necessary for such reflection and revision. Discussion of learning outcomes not only helps craft meaningful major requirements, but it also encourages faculty to think carefully about historical skills and liberal learning goals as they design and teach courses. Furthermore, such conversations will encourage faculty members to situate themselves within the larger liberal education mission of the university. These discussions in the departments should be supplemented with discussions with colleagues in other departments (including the library and centers for new media) and university administration about the goals of liberal learning. We hope university officials will encourage these cross-disciplinary conversations by initiating them and by finding ways to offer institutional rewards (or at least to remove disincentives) for faculty contributions to liberal education outside of the department. □

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

The Religious Studies Major and Liberal Education

THESE DAYS, it is hardly news when a publication prints a retraction. When the retraction is for an eight-year-old *obituary*, though, people tend to stand up and to take notice.

As the 1990s came to a close, the *Economist* was so certain of the imminent demise of organized religion that it featured God's obituary in its final issue of the millennium. The editors' perspective was clear, if myopic. Church attendance in much of Western Europe was in free fall. "The cynical, questioning, anti-authoritarian West," often led by college professors, had just completed a century of relentless (and frequently effective) attacks on religious belief. For politicians, intellectuals, and even some clerics, "religion was becoming marginal to public life . . . [and] faith an irrelevance in foreign policy" (1999). The U.S. secretary of state at the time, Madeleine Albright, was of the opinion that any given world problem was "complicated enough without bringing God and religion into it" (Carnes 2006). And when Henry Kissinger published his nine-hundred-page, career-summarizing *Diplomacy* in 1994, the word "religion" did not even appear in the index. Religion was on the way out. Or so the defenders of the Enlightenment canon declared.

How times have changed.

The proportion of the world's population that claims membership in the four largest religions—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism—actually *increased* over the past century, from 67 percent in 1900 to 73 percent in 2005 (World Christian Database 2007). The number is predicted to reach 80 percent

by 2050. In 2007, Harvard faculty engaged in a very public debate over the importance of the study of religion in the university's core curriculum, with the approved core featuring multiple references to religion (if stopping short of mandating its study). Former Secretary of State Albright (2000) is now a highly vocal advocate of the public role of religion, writing that the failure of Americans to understand other religions "poses one of the great challenges to our public diplomacy." And in November 2007, the *Economist* printed a retraction of its notorious obituary, declaring: "Atheists and agnostics hate the fact, but these days religion is an inescapable part of politics."

Of course, those of us in the field of religious studies know that religion has always been an inescapable part of politics, as well as an inescapable part of economics, foreign policy, social mores, and domestic interactions. The waning years of the twentieth century were certainly no exception. While the reality has not changed in recent years, public perceptions doubtlessly have. World events have led Americans to a new appreciation of the importance of knowledge about religion and to a vivid awareness of the dangers that emerge when we fail to recognize religion as a potent source of motivation and behavior. In a world shaped not merely by 9/11 but by Iraq, Bosnia, Kashmir, and the West Bank—not merely by abortion, but by gay marriage, intelligent design, euthanasia, and stem cells—Americans increasingly accept the idea that we need better to understand the diverse range of religious phenomena. In one recent survey (Wuthenow 2007), over 80 percent of Americans responded

If we truly wish for students to engage the tremendous variety of human understandings of life, death, suffering, love, and meaning, there is perhaps no more direct path than through the study of religion





Hebrew College

affirmatively to the question, “Do you think people should learn more about religions other than their own?”

In a sense, our job as scholars of religion became a lot easier on September 11, 2001. Suddenly, the arguments we had been making for years about the importance of understanding world religious traditions were being made by others: not merely by former secretaries of state and magazine editors, not merely by the general public, but by college deans, provosts, and presidents—at times, even by our “cynical, questioning, anti-authoritarian” colleagues.

A return to liberal education?

Concurrent with (if largely coincidental to) these changes in public perceptions of the importance of religious literacy, there emerged a new (or reemerged an age-old?) debate about the quality and nature of the education provided

by American colleges and universities. In 2006, former Harvard President Derek Bok reported that American colleges and universities “accomplish far less for their students than they should,” citing deficiencies in the teaching of writing, critical thinking, and problem solving as well as a failure to impart “the knowledge needed to be a reasonably informed citizen in a democracy” (2006, 8). Beginning in 2003, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, surveyed over one hundred thousand American college students in a multiyear study of students’ engagement with issues of spirituality and religiousness. In 2006, HERI convened a National Institute for Spirituality in Higher Education, seeking to explore “the role of liberal education in students’ development” and “to find creative ways to encourage the development of curricular and

co-curricular [initiatives] around issues of spirituality” (Bryant and Schwartz 2006, 1).

Meanwhile, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) was conducting a multiyear study of liberal education that concluded, “the world in which today’s students will make choices and compose lives is one of disruption rather than certainty, and of interdependence rather than insularity” (2007, 15). It called for a widespread shift in the “focus of schooling from accumulating course credits to building real-world capabilities” (5). In its influential 2007 report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, AAC&U mapped out four essential learning outcomes for all American college students:

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**, “focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring”
- **Intellectual and Practical Skills**, including “critical and creative thinking,” “inquiry and analysis,” and “written and oral communication”
- **Personal and Social Responsibility**, including “civic knowledge and engagement—local and global,” “intercultural knowledge and competence,” and “ethical reasoning and action”
- **Integrative Learning**, including the synthesis and “application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems” (12)

For many of us in the field of religious studies, these “new directions” for American college students seemed anything but novel. The four essential outcomes embraced by AAC&U outline themes that religious studies has been focusing on for decades: intercultural learning, engagement of big questions, critical thinking and writing, moral reasoning, and the application of all of these skills to new global contexts and lived behaviors. It is safe to say that few disciplines in the academy more centrally and more naturally address the AAC&U outcomes than does the field of religious studies.

At a time when leaders in higher education are increasingly asking students to engage the large issues of life’s meaning and to think critically and responsibly about their role in the world, religious studies offers unique opportunities. Other disciplines such as philosophy, literature, and the creative arts doubtlessly engage questions of ultimate meaning. Yet these

endeavors are largely the province of the talented few: the philosopher, the novelist, the poet, the painter, the dancer. The rest of us are the audience. While, to be sure, we can learn to appreciate the creations of these artists and scholars, we remain observers. Religion, by contrast, is largely created by its adherents. Millions of worshipers and hundreds of thousands of local religious communities—through their prayers, rituals, devotions, and acts of charity; their conversations about scriptures; and their hierarchies and institutions—shape and are shaped by the religious meanings of their traditions. If we truly wish for students to engage the tremendous variety of human understandings of life, death, suffering, love, and meaning, there is perhaps no more direct path than through the study of religion.

Clearly, the field of religious studies now finds itself at a pivotal moment. An unprecedented confluence of world events, public perceptions, and educational insights has created exciting possibilities for the growth and reimagining of the field—possibilities that were unthinkable even a decade ago. The current moment presents important opportunities for the academic study of religion—and poses a series of challenges. How we, as scholars of religion, respond to these challenges may well have much to say about the future of the discipline—not to mention the future of American public literacy about a broad range of religious phenomena.

The religious studies major in transition

The religious studies major is in a state of flux. By most indicators, the field is growing, perhaps significantly. The number of religious studies majors increased by 22 percent in the past decade (to an estimated forty-seven thousand students), with like percentage increases in the number of total courses offered, course enrollments, and faculty positions in the field.¹ The number of religious studies majors at public institutions has grown even more rapidly, by 40 percent during the same period, signifying a sea change in the field. What was once a major situated largely within liberal arts colleges and denominationally linked institutions is now establishing a widespread presence at state universities. In the past five years alone, new degree programs or departments of religion have been proposed or established at the University of Texas; Ohio State University;

Georgia State University; the University of Minnesota; the University of North Carolina, Charlotte; the University of North Carolina, Asheville; and Towson State University—among other public institutions. In part shaped by this trend, the number of religion degree programs that are housed in free-standing religion departments also appears to be on the rise, with the total now topping 50 percent.

What constitutes the religious studies major is also undergoing rapid change. The American Academy of Religion conducted comprehensive surveys of undergraduate course offerings in religion in both 2000 and 2005. The results are striking, if not surprising. The number of sections taught of courses in Islam and Hinduism each almost doubled during the five-year period; by most indications, courses in Christian theology, Old Testament, and New Testament were all flat or down. Sections of Introduction to World Religions grew in number; sections of Introduction to the Bible declined.² There is a very real shift occurring in the field of religious studies—not a shift away from the study of Western religions *per se* (indeed, courses in the Introduction to Western Religions were up significantly during the five-year period), but one away from the study of Christianity in isolation.

At religiously linked schools such as Colorado Christian University (Council of Christian Colleges and Universities) and Santa Clara University (Jesuit), efforts are underway to reconceive and to globalize the study of religion on campus. Colorado Christian provides a particularly interesting example of the transformation of the field. An evangelical university that “purposefully seeks to foster spiritual as well as intellectual growth,” Colorado Christian has just added its first comparative course in world religions and seeks to establish a religious studies major. On a campus where “Christianity isn’t a religion, it’s a life,” such undertakings can be controversial. As Frank Ames (2007) reports, “although many parochial institutions maintain high academic standards for students and appoint capable scholars and teachers to their faculties—and often succeed in providing excellent education—it is fair to say that religious commitment at times diminishes empathy

There is a very real shift occurring in the field of religious studies—not a shift away from the study of Western religions *per se*, but one away from the study of Christianity in isolation

toward the Other and awareness of the Self, which are essential in religious studies.” While Ames and his colleagues at Colorado Christian are currently negotiating the at times subtle lines between personal religious commitment and the scholarly study of religious traditions, they are convinced of the importance of the acad-

emic study of other religions amid a Christian devotional context.

At Santa Clara, the department is consciously involved in efforts to “explore the shape and function of theological studies in relation to other approaches to religion,” including political science, history, classics, women’s and gender studies, and environmental studies (Crowley 2007, 24).

Colorado Christian and Santa Clara are part of a larger movement in which departments and curricula in religious studies at public, private, and church-related institutions are gradually, persistently, and unevenly shifting from a “seminary model” for the study of religion (in which courses in Bible, Christian history, and Christian doctrine are seen as primary and courses on other religions and aspects of religion are deemed secondary or even unnecessary) to a comparative model (in which the focus is on promoting student understanding of the beliefs, practices, and histories of multiple religious traditions in a comparative context).

Faculty and administrator misperceptions of the field

In the state system of Texas, another sort of transformation is underway. Between 1905 and 1985, almost all instruction in religion within the units of the Texas College and University System was performed by “Bible Chairs:” ministers nominated and paid for by various Christian denominations and often teaching from an explicitly devotional perspective. The practice was declared unconstitutional in the mid-1980s, but a perception that religious studies is indistinguishable from religious practice remained in the minds of many administrators and faculty members across the state. The permission granted in May 2007 to the University of Texas, Austin, to establish the first-ever Department of Religion within the state system represents a significant change in state policy.



Kent State University

But old perceptions die slowly; on one university campus in Texas, while 98 percent of the faculty agree that religion influences world events in significant ways, 10 percent of the faculty members are still of the opinion that religious studies courses are, by their very nature, unconstitutional (Raphael 2007). Such sentiments fly in the face of nearly unanimous legal consensus. Nonetheless, the concerns of some faculty members, in Texas and elsewhere, who fear that religious studies necessarily entails an encroachment of religious practice into the classroom can still present real obstacles to the development of the discipline in state settings.

In some senses, what is happening in the Texas state system parallels the movements at Colorado Christian and Santa Clara—a transitioning of the religion major from a seminary to a comparative model. In Texas and other

state-school contexts, though, the common fear faced is not that religious studies is not Christian enough, but rather that it might be too much so.

Evolving interdisciplinary efforts and subfields

Amid already established programs of religious studies, the challenges are often of a different nature. At the University of Minnesota and Louisiana State University, efforts are underway to increase the interdisciplinary outreach of relatively small programs as a means of growing both curricular resources and institutional allies. In these settings, the size and scope of the religious studies major is growing, but largely through increased collaboration between core faculty and colleagues in cognate departments. The university appointment of a scholar in

Hinduism, for instance, might be jointly shared between religious studies and Asian studies. Gail Hinich Sutherland of Louisiana State observes (2008), “this is going to mean that we probably have to leave the narrow textualists for seminaries and well endowed private universities. No one wants to trade scholarly profundities for glib generalities but we must take note of the world we are preparing our students to inhabit.”

This is not to say that textual study is unimportant to students of religious studies. Still, in certain interdisciplinary and area-studies settings, emerging perceptions of the public importance of religious studies are already shaping the nature and direction of the field, pointing the way to courses and faculty appointments in some subfields and not in others. Indeed, such directions may be partially responsible for the rapid nationwide increase in the number of courses in areas such as Hinduism and Islam but decline in the number of courses in Bible and theology.

Defining and assessing the major

The faculties of established programs of religious studies are grappling with the challenge of assessment. Amid a national wave of assessment initiatives, programs are scrambling to find ways to fit the notoriously broad and ever-evolving field of religious studies into rubrics both literal and metaphorical. Of the thirty programs submitting “seed grant” proposals to the American Academy of Religion’s Teagle initiative on the religious studies major, fully one-half already

offer some kind of capstone course or experience to their majors. Many other programs are contemplating adding such a capstone.

But what should be the nature of such courses, how specifically do they contribute to assessment, and are there alternate models for assessment that might be more effective? Eckerd College, for example, blends comprehensive examinations in three fields with a substantial paper that together form the basis for an extended conversation between the student and the departmental faculty. Rhodes College has experimented with a model of faculty-student research collaboration.

Clearly, part of the challenge in developing assessment strategies for the discipline is the fact that there is continuing debate about the appropriate *content* of the religious studies major (though the depth of these debates may be exaggerated at times). Unlike a number of undergraduate disciplines that have accrediting bodies enforcing uniform content for the major or that spring from long-established disciplinary histories, religious studies is relatively new and evolving. Its strong interdisciplinary content complicates assessment further, as the major often straddles multiple departments. A final problem is the relative lack of reliable data collected by departments and the discipline about the career paths of students graduating with undergraduate degrees in religious studies.

Given that the content of the religious studies major is in flux and information about what students do with the major after graduation is incomplete at best, the tasks of defining the major and then assessing it represent continuing challenges across the discipline.

Growth in community colleges

At any given moment, 46 percent of American college students are attending community and two-year colleges. Courses in world religions, introduction to religion, philosophy of religion, Bible, and even Islam are increasingly common in these settings (over 40 percent of community colleges now offer coursework in the field). In light of the rapid increase in the number of religious studies majors at state universities, it is safe to assume that community colleges provide the training ground for many majors in the field (Young 2007).

For the subset of community college students who do not continue on to four-year institutions, their community college education might

Teagle Working Group Members

The American Academy of Religion (AAR) Working Group included the following members: Timothy Renick (principal investigator), Georgia State University; Lynn Schofield Clark, Denver University; Kyle Cole, AAR; Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Claremont School of Theology; Eugene V. Gallagher, Connecticut College; Mitch Leopard, Cable News Network; Eugene Y. Lowe Jr., Northwestern University; Darby Ray, Millsaps College; Amna Shirazi, Shirazi Law Group; and Chava Weissler, Lehigh University.

Working Group Recommendations

As part of the Teagle Foundation initiative on the relationship between the disciplines and undergraduate liberal education, the American Academy of Religion Working Group issued a series of specific recommendations for improving the religious studies major. The recommendations can be found in the full report of the working group, which is available online at www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/publications.aspx.

provide their only formal opportunity to take courses in religious studies. In many cases, contact, let alone coordination, between the faculties of four-year institutions and those of the “feeder” community colleges in their areas is all but nonexistent.

The task ahead

In 1999, precisely the time when the *Economist* was releasing its obituary of God, historian D. G. Hart was publishing an obituary of another sort. In *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education*, Hart presented a bleak picture of the future of academic study of religion, declaring it a “field in search of a rationale.” He concluded that “as religious studies strives to sever ties to communities of faith, it cannot do so without self-immolation” (1999, 10).

Like the *Economist’s* declaration of God’s demise, Hart’s prediction may have been premature. The last decade has seen rapid growth in the academic study of religion and, by many indicators, this growth has been spurred on by an emerging consensus, both public and academic, about what the scholarly study of religion entails and why it is important to students and society. With almost fifty thousand students majoring in religious studies in American colleges and universities at any given time (and with that number increasing rapidly), scholars of religion will play a significant role in shaping what the next generation of Americans knows, thinks, and does with regard to religion. Clearly, our efforts to improve the major in religious studies and to strengthen its links to the goals of liberal education are anything but purely academic. □

REFERENCES

- Albright, M. 2000. From the secretary. *State* (September). Quoted in Peck 2001.
- Albright, M. 2006. *The mighty and the almighty: Reflections on America, God, and world affairs*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ames, F. 2007. Establishing the religious studies major: Stories from the Colorado Christian University trenches. Leadership Workshop. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2007. *College learning for the new global century: A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Bok, D. 2006. *Our underachieving colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bryant, A. N., and L. M. Schwartz. 2006. *National institute on spirituality in higher education: Integrating spirituality into the campus curriculum and co-curriculum*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.
- Carnes, T. 2006. Q&A: Madeleine Albright. *Christianity Today*, June, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/juneweb-only/126-43.0.html.
- Crowley, P. G. 2007. Religious studies in a Jesuit context. *Religious Studies News* 22 (4): 24.
- Economist*. 1999. God. December 23.
- Hart, D. G. 1999. *The university gets religion: Religious studies in American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kissinger, H. 1994. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Peck, E. 2001. Doing it all wrong in the Middle East: Iraq. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 12 (4): 13–26.
- Raphael, R. 2007. Religious studies in Texas: A mission without a major. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA.
- Sutherland, G. H. 2008. Report on the AAR/Teagle seed grant. Unpublished report, American Academy of Religion.
- World Christian Database. 2007. www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/; (accessed November 1).
- Wuthnow, R. 2007. Religious diversity in a “Christian nation”: American identity and American democracy. In *Democracy and the new religious pluralism*, ed. T. Banchoff, 151–70. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Young, S. 2007. Out of sight, out of mind: Religious studies and the community college. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA.

NOTES

- 1 All statistics in this paragraph are derived from the American Academy of Religion, Census of Religion and Theology Programs, 1996, 2000, and 2005. (See www.aarweb.org/Programs/Department_Services/Survey_Data/Undergraduate.)
- 2 American Academy of Religion, Census of Religion and Theology Programs, 2000 and 2005. Because the number of institutions responding to the survey differed during the two survey periods, the statistics cited in this paragraph are based upon the number of sections offered of the particular course as a percentage of the total number of sections offered during each survey period.

ALAIN DE BOTTON

Reclaiming the Intellectual Life for Posterity

IF YOU WENT TO ANY UNIVERSITY in the country and said that you had come to study “how to live,” you would be politely shown the door—if not the way to an asylum. Universities see it as their job to train you either in a specific career (law, medicine) or to give you a grounding in “the humanities”—but for no identifiable reason, beyond the vague and unexamined notion that a few years studying the classics or reading *Middlemarch* may be a good idea.

The contemporary university is an uncomfortable amalgamation of ambitions once held by a variety of educational institutions. It owes

debts to the philosophical schools of Ancient Greece

and Rome, to the monasteries of the Middle Ages, to the theological colleges of Paris, Padua, and Bologna and to the research laboratories of early modern science. One of the legacies of this heterogeneous background is that academics in the humanities have been forced to disguise both from themselves and their students why their subjects really matter—for the sake of attracting money and prestige in a world obsessed by the achievements of science and unable to find a sensible way of assessing the value of a novel or a history book.

The chief problem for anyone in a history or English department today is that science has been too successful. Science can make your car work, fix your liver, send spaceships to Mars, and turn sunlight into electricity. In other words, science is to be valued because it gives us control over our fate, whereas in W. H. Auden’s defiant words “poetry makes nothing happen.” Auden’s stance may be a heroic rallying cry for the freelance poet, but it becomes more alarming as a job description for a young academic who has just completed a doctorate on Biblical references in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s later verse.

The response of humanities departments to their status anxiety has been to mimic their colleagues in physics or astronomy—in a move

ALAIN DE BOTTON is the author of several books on the “philosophy of everyday life,” including *How Proust Can Change Your Life*. He started and helps run the *School of Life*, a school in London dedicated to a new vision of education (see www.theschooloflife.com). This article was originally published in the July 2008 issue of *Standpoint* magazine. Reprinted by permission.

M Y V I E W

Students in the ideal University of Life would end up knowing much the same material as their colleagues in other institutions, they would simply have learned it under a very different set of headings





that has had short-term gains, but is in danger of asphyxiating certain subjects in the long run. Academics in the arts have decided that they, too, should be viewed as “researchers” and that their principal value should come from their capacity to discover new things, like chemists might uncover new molecular structures. There are clearly occasions when scholars do make genuine discoveries which can be compared to breakthroughs in science, but it surely represents a distortion of the value of the arts as a whole to make their

The chief problem for anyone in a history or English department today is that science has been too successful

value entirely dependent on factual, verifiable criteria.

To do so is to behave like a man who has fallen deeply in love and asks his companion if he might act on his emotions by measuring the distance between her elbow and her shoulder blade. In the modern academy, an art historian, on being stirred to tears by the tenderness and serenity he detects in a work by a fourteenth-century Florentine painter, typically ends up answering his emotions by writing a monograph, as irreproachable as it is bloodless, on



the history of paint manufacture in the age of Giotto.

It was in the sixteenth century that the greatest antiacademic scholar of the West launched his attack on the bias of universities. Michel de Montaigne, who had an encyclopedic knowledge of all the great texts, nevertheless deplored the way in which academics tended to privilege learning over wisdom. “I gladly come back to the theme of the absurdity of our education: its end has not been to make us good and wise, but learned. And, to a large extent, it has succeeded.

“It has not taught us to seek virtue and to embrace wisdom: it has impressed upon us

their derivation and their etymology. We readily inquire, ‘Does he know Greek or Latin?’ ‘Can he write poetry and prose?’ But what matters most is what we put last: ‘Has he become better and wiser?’”

So in idle moments, I dream of an ideal new sort of institution which could welcome Montaigne, or indeed Nietzsche, Goethe, or Kierkegaard—a University of Life that would give students the tools to master their lives through the study of culture rather than using culture just for the sake of passing an exam.

This ideal University of Life (which would be equipped with an elegant logo, cafeteria, and headquarters) would draw on traditional areas of knowledge (history, art, literature) but would angle its material toward active concerns (how to choose a career, conduct a relationship, sack someone, and get ready to die).

The university would never take the importance of culture for granted. It would know that culture is kept alive by a constant respectful questioning—not by an excessive and snobbish attitude of respect. Therefore, rather than leaving it hanging why one was reading *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary*, an ideal course covering nineteenth-century literature would ask plainly “What is it that adultery ruins in a marriage?” Students in the ideal University of Life would end up knowing much the same material as their colleagues in other institutions, they would simply have learned it under a very different set of headings.

On the menu of the ideal university, you wouldn’t find subjects like “philosophy,” “French,” “history,” and “the classics.” You would find yourself able to sign up for courses in “death,” “marriage,” “choosing a career,” “ambition,” “child rearing,” or “changing your world.” Too often, these head-on assaults on the great questions are abandoned to the second-rate efforts of gurus and motivational speakers. It is time for high culture to reappropriate them and to consider them with all the rigor and seriousness currently too often lavished on topics of minor relevance.

Plato’s Academy, set up in a bucolic corner of Athens in 387 BC, remains the best model for people dreaming of Universities of Life. The Greek philosopher’s intention was, broadly speaking, political. He believed in civilization and the power of rational thought, and felt that these were being undermined by the degenerate forces of his age, not least by the



Skidmore College



politicians who dominated Athenian affairs. The philosopher envisaged his university as a chance to change the climate of opinion and to perform in the outside world some of the same intellectually hygienic maneuvers as he practiced in many of his books.

Plato's belief that wise books may not be enough feels correct, to this writer at least. However convinced one might be at an intellectual level of one's commitments to an examined life, one risks being only reliably devoted to it when it is routinely affirmed by such public institutions as magazines, television stations, and universities. In danger of

being corrupted by the idle chat of our societies, we require places where the aspirations inside us get some confirmation from prestigious bodies around us.

It is common to accept that new desires and needs should continually spawn start-up businesses. So it seems only right that our multiple cultural needs, many of which remain ill-served even in this exceptionally wealthy era, should every now and then also be allowed to spawn original cultural institutions that could better serve our deepest intellectual aspirations. I'll continue to dream of a world which is sensibly equipped with a University of Life. □

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: University of Richmond, photographer Chris Ijams

Pages 7, 23: University of Richmond, photographer Jason Jones

Pages 10, 20: The College of Wooster, photographer Matt Dilyard

Page 15: College of the Holy Cross, photographer Christopher Navin

Page 16: College of William and Mary, photographer Stephen Salpuka

Pages 19: Catawba College

Pages 24–25: Middlebury College, photographer Bob Handelman

Page 26: Middlebury College, photographer Bridget Besaw

Page 31: Smith College

Page 33: Washington and Lee University

Pages 34–35, 42: De Anza College

Page 37: University of Denver

Pages 41, 53: Kent State University, photographer Jeff Glidden

Pages 44–45: Skidmore College, photographer Andy Camp

Page 49: College of St. Benedict

Page 50: Hebrew College

Pages 56–57: Indiana University-Bloomington: photographer Chris Meyer

Pages 58–59: DePauw University

Page 60: Skidmore College, photographer Mark McCarty

AAC&U BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair
Eduardo J. Padrón
President, Miami Dade
College

Past Chair
Daniel F. Sullivan
President, St. Lawrence
University

Vice Chair
David W. Oxtoby
President, Pomona College

Treasurer
Bobby Fong
President, Butler University

President, AAC&U
Carol Geary Schneider

Ex Officio/Chair, ACAD
Linda Cabe Halpern
Dean of University Studies,
James Madison University

Diana D. Akiyama
Former Director of Religious
and Spiritual Life, Occidental
College

Carol A. Cartwright
Interim President, Bowling
Green State University

Rebecca S. Chopp
President, Colgate University

Andrew Delbanco
Julian Clarence Levi Professor
in the Humanities, Columbia
University

Mildred García
President, California State
University–Dominguez Hills

Helen F. Giles-Gee
President, Keene State
College

Ramón A. Gutiérrez
Preston & Sterling Morton
Distinguished Service
Professor in United States
History and the College;
Director, Center for the
Study of Race, Poverty,
and Culture, University
of Chicago

Evelynn Hammonds
Dean of Harvard College,
and Barbara Gutman
Rosenkrantz Professor of
the History of Science and
of African and African
American Studies, Harvard
University

Leo I. Higdon Jr.
President, Connecticut College

Leo M. Lambert
President, Elon University

Carol A. Lucey
President, Western Nevada
College

David E. Maxwell
President, Drake University

Gail O. Mellow
President, City University of
New York La Guardia
Community College

M. Lee Pelton
President, Willamette
University

David E. Shi
President, Furman University

Lou Anna Simon
President, Michigan State
University

John B. Simpson
President, State University of
New York at Buffalo

Mary Spilde
President, Lane Community
College

Robert J. Sternberg
Dean of the School of Arts
and Sciences, Tufts University

Jane V. Wellman
Executive Director, Delta
Project on Postsecondary
Education Costs,
Productivity, and
Accountability

Richard H. Wells
Chancellor, University
of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Ronald A. Williams
Vice President,
The College Board

LE EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Norman Adler
Yeshiva University

Johnnella E. Butler
Spelman College

Julie Ellison
University of Michigan

Walter E. Fluker
Morehouse College

Thomas F. Flynn
Alvernia College

William S. Green
University of Miami

R. Stanton Hales
The College of Wooster

Tori Haring-Smith
Washington and Jefferson
College

Samuel M. Hines Jr.
The Citadel, the Military
College of South Carolina

Patricia Hutchings
The Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of
Teaching

Norman Jones
Utah State University

Peter N. Kiang
University of Massachusetts
Boston

Roberta S. Matthews
City University of New York
Brooklyn College

Jo Ellen Parker
National Institute for
Technology and Liberal
Education

Bridget Puzon
Ursuline Provincialate;
editor of *Liberal Education*
1993–2004

Sheldon Rothblatt
University of California,
Berkeley

Peter Stearns
George Mason University

Neil B. Weissman
Dickinson College

Cynthia Wilson
League for Innovation in
the Community College

Vera Zdravkovich
CyberWATCH Center



Association
of American
Colleges and
Universities

1818 R St. NW
Washington, DC 20009

www.aacu.org

PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID

NETWORK FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL



Carleton College, photographer Tom Roster



Agnes Scott College, photographer Lee Dancy



University of Puget Sound



Messiah College

AAC&U Working Conferences for 2009–2010

Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility

Deepening Student and
Campus Commitments

Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 1–3, 2009

Integrative Learning

Addressing the
Complexities

Atlanta, Georgia
October 22–24, 2009

General Education and Assessment

Maintaining Momentum,
Achieving New Priorities

Seattle, Washington
February 18–20, 2010

Faculty Roles in High-Impact Practices

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
March 25–27, 2010



Network for Academic Renewal:

Exploring together the latest advances in teaching and learning, faculty work and leadership, diversity and inclusive excellence, general education reform, curricular and co-curricular connections, and assessment for learning in undergraduate education.