

EXCELLENCE IN JUDGMENT: The Curriculum*

by

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Treating higher education on the model of corporate management has led to the misfortune of mis-identifying the goals of higher education. While there is no particular difficulty in conceiving a corporate chief executive officer who is unable to perform the discrete productive tasks that constitute the principal outputs of a major corporation, there is every difficulty conceivable in attempting to provide leadership in higher education without the leaders accomplishing the very goal of higher education. The reason for this plainly is that the productive goal or “principal output” of higher education is fundamentally identical with the capability required for effective management, and that is excellence in judgment.

It would be idle to insist that a university president must use his rostrum “or betray a trust,” unless one could also expect an excellence of judgment that justifies the “heavy responsibility for explaining not only his own institution but also the cause of education generally.”¹ However it is precisely excellence in judgment that qualifies one for “leadership as to ends and purposes and not as to methods and subject matter.”

Qualifications for academic leadership differ substantially from the qualification for directing the shipping and receiving operations of a major industrial enterprise. Although a shipping manager sits astride the very life-line of a major enterprise and must succeed in coordinating and regulating communications throughout the entire corporate body, much as the heart alimnts the human body, she would err grievously who thought that particular talent a substitute for the brain. Nor does that observation bar the ascent of a talented officer from shipping manager to c.e.o.; it only insists that it is not the specific talent for coordinating system-wide communication that justifies the promotion to c.e.o. So what do we seek in an academic leader?

When we want to travel into space, we are well advised to place ourselves in the hands of technical experts who can get us there and back again. When we require brain

* These remarks have been adapted, and greatly extended, from “The Challenges of Academic Leadership,” in *The Clarion*, November/December 1999 (Raleigh, N.C.: The Pope Center for Higher Education Policy), pp. 12-35. They reflect my thinking as it developed, not only through a long career teaching, but also in the course of my tenure as Director, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. This paper is published in the *Proceedings* of the Hailsham conference.

¹ Harold W. Stoke, *The American College President* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959), p. 94.

surgery, we do well to consult neurosurgeons. Education is in many ways not different from such challenging initiatives; appropriate goal setting requires expert judgment. If we mean, though, to ask the public to pay for our space ships, our brain surgery, or our college education, then our space scientists, our neurosurgeons, and our higher education administrators must explain to the public exactly what it will get for its money. In all cases the fundamental commitment of public support turns on decisions that must be made by public bodies.

Technical experts provide the public information that constitutes the basis of sound decisions, enabling all stakeholders to play appropriate roles in carrying out these crucial missions. Lay boards are incompetent to declare what appropriate educational goals should be, but they are perfectly competent to say, “I understand,” when presented with articulate formulations of those goals by college leaders. Effective lay leaders are not troubled by the fact that they might fail to understand a thing itself perfectly understandable. And why should they be? For they are typically experts in their own right in other fields – legal, medical, technical, or business. The trouble in higher education overall is that academic leaders fail to articulate goals not merely understandable but also appropriately elevated.

There are two reasons for this failure. First, the goal of university education has been “corrupted” by the proliferation of ancillary subject matters and demands for “skills certification.” Thus we get the “multiversity.” Second, academic leaders have abandoned the true goal of higher education, proficient humanity. Thus we substitute “critical thinking,” “values clarification,” or “tolerance” for skill in moral judgment. While these may be tools of effective management, they do not answer to the central requirement or skill of excellence in judgment.

What does answer to that central requirement is a robust curriculum of general education. The goal of such a curriculum is a proficient humanity that is characterized by excellence in judgment. With the exception of teachers, it does not produce “professionals.” Nor does it produce disciplinary adepts. It does prepare students to advance in graduate study in chosen fields. But what it does most is to build the character and knowledge more generally to be attributed to “statesmen, legislators, and judges” and, in this context, to leaders of higher education. For the best of these display a sure knowledge of human arts and culture.

MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

The century just ending produced the efflorescence of the modern university – the multiversity. One scholar identifies the emergence of the research university as decisive as early as 1910.² Note, though, that early views of the research university – and hence the management task – differ profoundly from views of the multiversity. Butler defined a research university as, “an institution where students adequately trained by previous study of the liberal arts and sciences are led into special fields of learning and research by teachers of high excellency and originality, and where by the agency of libraries, muse-

² Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1965): “University builders’ anchored the research university as the primary form of American higher education by 1910.”

ums, laboratories, and publications knowledge is conserved, advanced, and disseminated.”³

The flowering of the multiversity took the form of massive and constant differentiation. The aspects of life and learning in the multiversity are so many-sided that only with difficulty may one consistently identify the wholes to which the diverse parts or units belong. John Francis and Mark Hampton have aptly substituted the metaphor of a flotilla for the more familiar “great ship” metaphor to describe the modern university.⁴ Their usage reminds us not only that the multiversity is constructed out of articulable or modular units, but that it is still presumed to seek a common destination.⁵

The century now opening poses the question whether a common destination or vision for the multiversity can survive the inertial momentum of large-scale differentiation. The millennial crossroads is defined as the choice between further differentiation (looking backward) or enhanced integration (looking forward).

Focusing on the research university (rather than the residential college), I argue that higher education ideally emphasizes the harmonized and coordinated functioning of dynamic and physical growth factors, but universities should compete mainly on the basis of dynamic growth. Program quality and efficiency, subject matter suitability and relevance, and discipline defining achievements (chief among which are graduates highly sought after) constitute the distinctive ways in which universities qualify themselves as educational exemplars. These should also be, therefore, the goals of effective management in higher education.

However, today open-ended, infinitely expanding enrollment is the very soul of the large research university, and particularly the public university. Productivity is far more routinely measured by growth in numbers – matriculants and dollars – than by any other factor. This inertial growth and the desire for it impose on the large university the logic of segmentation – some would say fragmentation. Within it the most specialized and the most growth-oriented units are the most successful. They produce as many graduates (plus credit hours) in as many sub-specialties as possible.

³ G. Montague Butler in James Goodwin Hodgson, *The Reference Shelf* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1931), p. 48.

⁴ “Resourceful Responses: The Adaptive Research University and the Drive to Market,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 70, No. 6 (November/December 1999), PP. 625FF.

⁵ Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalization: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: 1970). The common destination need not be ennobling, a different problem. Bledstein’s exploration of professionalization and the middle class examined higher education’s cultural implications within a history of university leadership. He accepted the university builder concept, describing these men as “business-minded, bureaucratic, focused on material establishment – i.e., raising money – and on improving institutional recognition.” By improving structure, Bledstein believed, “the university builders reinforced middle class demands for an orderly environment in which to advance their status.” The university made this new professionalism widely available to the middle class.

Opposed to inertial growth and productivity is the dynamic growth of program quality and reputation. Dynamic growth measures the quality of academic life rather than the quantity of academic life. Better teaching? That means lower GPAs (and fewer graduates). More integrated learning? Abler students. Readier attainment of life-long learning as a reflex and not just as a slogan? Cultural richness. And most ineffably of all, superior understanding. Are not these all the virtues of education we strive for? Are not these also the very virtues sacrificed to the logic of inertial growth?

The broad, administrative challenge, then, is to privilege dynamic approaches to learning over inertial approaches. And the challenge of management effectiveness in this regards leads ineluctably to a focus on the fundamental area of leadership – the setting of curricular ends in the light of which effective management becomes possible in the first place.

LEADERSHIP: The Case of General Education

The very heart of the problem we are discussing is the noted failure of higher education to provide adequately for “general” or “liberal education.”⁶

In the autumn of 1989 the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States, Dr. Lynn Cheney, issued a report calling for “50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students.” That call sparked a flurry of interested conversations focused above all on the question how far the diverse institutions of higher education in the U.S. might or should aim for a common standard.

The NEH report naturally envisioned broad ranges of diversity reflecting diverse educational missions. What it invited educational leaders to do beyond their missions was to assess their respective obligations to offer and attain certain educational minima.

Ten years later we saw in general continuing movement away from rather than towards “50 Hours.” In other words, pieties about general education, core curricula, or more precisely, what it means to be educated, have not been accompanied by significant progress toward a curriculum to match the piety. At the same time, it is here that the academic leader will rise most surely to the task of leadership.

The spirit of general education reform in higher education advances the cause of integration against the continuing pressures of differentiation. In Virginia we responded in that spirit to accounts of deficiencies in the general education programs in the public colleges and universities in the Commonwealth. We surveyed the entire scene, public and private, and we concluded that, while Virginia averted the worst of the contemporary

⁶ Very recently we learn of another shocking example of the failure: In “Losing America’s Memory” the American Council of Trustees and Alumni have documented the failure of the fifty-five most highly regarded colleges and universities in the United States. According to the report, released 21 February 2000, students are graduating from these institutions with a “profound historical illiteracy.”

disasters in general education, it could still benefit greatly from giving more earnest attention to the subject.⁷

We do not often enough recall that general education emerged, at first, as a step down from the rigors of serious university education.⁸ In the first thirty or forty years of the twentieth century, as institutions experienced an inundation of “unprepared” students, means were sought to provide some access to learning, if not the complete curriculum designed for a full “liberal education.” That was certainly true of the initial general education program at the University of Minnesota. Nevertheless, elements of the description of that program paved the way toward the eventual embrace of general education as the equivalent of liberal education in the advanced university.

General education is different from, and complementary to, special training for a job, for a profession, or for scholarship in a particular field of knowledge. Special training is important. Fine scholarship in a narrow line is excellent. Such training alone, however, is not enough to help get us ready for all our living. We spend less than a third of our lives in work. A much greater share of our time is spent in living with our families, bringing up our children, playing at our hobbies, relaxing in sleep or recreation, and attending to our rights and duties as citizens...⁹

General education was “extra” education in this conception. At the same time, the pressure to preserve liberal education from pre-professionalism was felt most strongly. The two streams of concern began to merge.

Many liberal arts colleges became largely pre-professional schools, especially in the big universities. Certainly it is hard for a student to secure a liberal education in four years when it has to be pieced together from many fragmentary specialized offerings. Cole in 1940 wrote:

The extreme degree of specialization indicated by the course offerings in large universities suggests strongly that these institutions are no place for an undergraduate to receive a general education, because he can hardly keep from getting into specialized courses before he is ready for them... The number of courses in the largest institutions is simply staggering. This development is the direct result of two forces – the actual increases of

⁷“General Education in Virginia: Assessment and Innovation” (Richmond, VA: State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 1999). <http://www.schev.edu/Reportstats/genedstudy.pdf?from=>

⁸ Robert Nisbet, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma* (New York: Basic Books, 1971, p. 126), does recall, but focuses too much on criteria of relevance and too little on qualifications of the students: “Whereas the...liberal arts phase [of the cult of individuality], declared disciplinary knowledge expendable, even injurious, the present and more radical phase declares all knowledge – knowledge, that is, in the traditional university sense – expendable, injurious, and, in the word of the hour, irrelevant.”

⁹ Ivor Spafford, *Building a Curriculum for General Education: A Description of the General College Program* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press: 1943), p. 1.

human knowledge and the modern tendency to adapt college work to vocational demands.’¹⁰

I invoke these mid twentieth century paeans to liberal education and general education ever mindful of the anxiety expressed by W. I. Nichols: “Our passion for well-rounded education is such that we are in danger of manufacturing a nation of billiard balls.”¹¹

Nonetheless, grounding our discussion in the prospects of democratic or republican life (as I wrote in the Virginia report on “General Education”) permits us to remain focused on the practical ends of education, without sacrificing the aim “to foster and cultivate the highest talent of the nation and raise the intellectual character of the whole, by throwing the light of science in the path of those whom nature has qualified to lead.”¹² In recent times practices in general education throughout the United States have been the subject of pervasive critique and profound skepticism.

RECENT CONCERNS ABOUT GENERAL EDUCATION

Every academic calendar produces new and dramatic examples of this debate. Recently, the University of Chicago lay beneath the microscope of inspection, as a result of a thirty-year trend of changing core requirements and a then pending major renovation. In 1998 Brooklyn College of City University of New York underwent the same inspection, eventuating in a retrenchment from a plan to broaden requirements. In most institutions the overriding question has been the departure from a sharply defined focus on the achievements of western civilization in favor of standards loosely understood as multicultural. At the core of the debate we find far less an ideological stand-off between defenders of one culture versus defenders of plural cultures than a fundamental misunderstanding of the contents of the previous curricula and the intellectual justification of the newer standards.

The newer standards pose a challenge to a supposed “canon” of sources believed to be rather narrow in their focus. In fact, however, the fundamental rationale for a focus on western culture has been its origin in the true original of multiculturalism. It has historically been western science and western civilization that have systematically advanced the goal of a broad understanding of humanity – as opposed to any particular culture – as the measure of intellectual progress. To that extent, a shift away from western culture toward multiculturalism is in fact a contradiction in terms.¹³

¹⁰ Luella Cole, *The Background for College Teaching* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940), pp. 50,51, cited in *ibid.* p. 12.

¹¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, 144: 947-56, October, 1929.

¹² Francis Wayland, in Hodgson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

¹³ While it would be a digression within the text, we should look at this issue more closely. Western culture is the true multiculturalism because it alone sustains the idea of universal humanity. While there may have been equally or even more dramatically universal cultures prior to and collateral with western culture, the only surviving cultures that compete with western culture have been exclusivist parochialisms. At times shoots of western culture have lurched in the direction of exclusivist parochialism. In fact, however, it has

The Virginia survey did not directly produce a well-considered judgment about the level of intellectual leadership applied to this dilemma within Virginia colleges and universities. Nevertheless, dimensions and tendencies enough were revealed to afford opportunity to speak to the strengths or weaknesses of general education programs and, above all, of the apparent lack of real intellectual leadership on the subject.

While there is not a single college or university in Virginia that rises to the standard of the curriculum I will set forth at the end of this essay (let alone the standard called for by Jefferson), it is nonetheless true, on the basis of a comparative assessment, that Virginia public institutions answered by anticipation many of the most damning criticisms. For example, perhaps no criticism of practices in general education is more persuasive than that which identifies a seemingly endless series of increasingly unrelated or over-specialized courses as fulfilling the very specific goals of a general education curriculum. That criticism was true only of the University of Virginia in Virginia.

The Virginia patterns were appraised against the backdrop of general standards promulgated by national bodies. We derived from the American Academy of Liberal Education (AALE) and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (previously, American Association of Colleges – AAC) general best practices in general education.

The published criteria emphasize not only subject or content areas but also the goals and management principles appropriate to general education.¹⁴ These benchmarks

been overwhelmingly characterized by the triumphant form that emerged in the modern European Enlightenment.

The modern European Enlightenment – and therefore western culture – has consistently pursued the universalizing over the particular. In that sense it has been unfriendly to parochialisms but not at the expense of respect for the humanity of the particularists. That is why it is multicultural; it fosters respect for the peoples of every culture, if not for the mutually exclusive competing cultures. Moreover, it does so by means of its two component parts, the secular and the religious, the philosophical and the sectarian, Athens and Jerusalem.

The tensions in western culture are not inconsiderable. It may be figured as a ship severed stem to stern, its port and starboard halves (the secular and the religious) lying side to side rather than joined at the center. It will appear difficult indeed to progress in any journey in that condition. Yet, somehow, it remains afloat.

¹⁴ AALE emphasizes that (standard one) the “mission statement reflects the importance and centrality of liberal education and states the institution's purposes and goals in a manner that corresponds to the way in which its curriculum is actually organized and taught.” Standards two and three require that the “importance of teaching [be] featured, supported, and rewarded in the life of the institution or program” and that “liberty of thought and freedom of speech [be] supported and protected, bound only by such rules of civility and order as to facilitate intellectual inquiry and the search for truth.”

“The general education requirement ensures a basic knowledge of mathematics and the physical and biological sciences, including laboratory experience, intermediate knowledge of at least one foreign language, and the study of literature and literary classics, the political, philosophical and cultural history of Western civilization, and the foundations and principles of American society. Variations from this norm are allowable in cases where the outstanding character of other elements of the general education program assures substantial compliance with these standards” (standard four).

“The curriculum's prerequisite structure, as defined and enforced, insures an orderly progression from elementary to advanced levels of knowledge, and the course definitions in the catalogue distinguish

were resolved into the set of criteria from which we derived the matrix on which we arrayed Virginia's institutions and assessed the extent of their accomplishment against the measure of these broadly recognized standards. In Virginia's study, however, we identified the goals of general education by seeking the first formulations of it in the official annals of the Commonwealth.

The State first attained the level of official and coherent expression of public goals in the "Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia" of 1818. More helpful, though, is the elaboration that followed the report, when the "Rector and Visitors," petitioned the Congress of the United States to eliminate the tariff duty on the importation of books. In that petition they signal forcefully the range of subjects in which they thought it appropriate to offer general instruction:

That the Commonwealth of Virginia has thought proper lately to establish an University, for instruction generally in all the useful branches of science...That the difficulty resulting from this mode of procuring books of the first order in the sciences, and in foreign languages, ancient and modern, is an unfair impediment to the American student, who, for want of these aids, already possessed or easily procurable in all countries except our own, enters on his course with very unequal means, with wants unknown to his foreign competitors, and often with that imperfect result which subjects us to reproaches not unfelt by minds alive to the honor and mortified sensibilities of their country. That the value of science to a republican people, the security it gives to liberty, by enlightening the minds of its citizens, the protection it affords against foreign power, the virtues it inculcates, the just emulation of the distinction it confers on nations foremost in it – in short, its identification with power, morals, order, and happiness... are topics which your petitioners do not permit themselves to

clearly among those considered fundamental (either to a general education or to mastery of a major), those less so, and those that belong to specialized subjects" (standard five).

The remaining AALE standards provide that the "baccalaureate requirements in the liberal arts and sciences call for not less than a third of the student's course work to be taken within the general education requirement (6)," that "the institution defines and enforces academic entrance requirements that prepare students to take the required college-level general education courses (7)," and that "a student writes substantial essays during every stage of progress as an undergraduate, and thereby demonstrates a proficiency in written English (8)." Moreover, "the institution evaluates student progress in learning the elements of general education taught under Standard Four, and ascertains how well it meets the educational goals it has set for itself, either by means of a general examination or some academic equivalent (9)."

General education courses are taught by "regular faculty members, including senior ones," and they "are regularly engaged in academic counseling (10)." "Class size is appropriate to subject matter, level of instruction, and need for class discussion (11)," and "the library and other information resources are adequate to the demands of its programs (12)."

AAC standards focus more on process and articulation than on content, providing in part that "strong general education programs explicitly answer the question, 'What is the point of general education?' (Principle 1)" and "embody institutional mission (2)." Such programs "continually strive for educational coherence (3)" and "are self-consciously value-based and teach social responsibility (4)." They "attend carefully to student experience (5)," "are consciously designed so that they will continue to evolve (6)," and "require and foster academic community (7)."

urge on the wisdom of Congress, before whose minds these considerations are already present, and bearing with their just weight.

We find in this appeal three useful indices:

- First, comparative assessment of the standards of general education with reference to the attainments of those thought most advanced;
- Second, the public good expected to be realized from general education at the highest level; and,
- Third, the voice of a lay leadership that lays out the goals publicly identified and pursued.

That the fruits of general education may be expressed as “power, morals, order, and happiness” may appear less than intuitive to us, for we typically express the goals of general education in reference to individual rather than corporate attainments. But the “Report of the Commissioners” makes clear that, while education in itself targets the individual, it aims at the public good.

The first indication of this emerges in the consideration that the commissioners carefully distinguished the ends of general education at the higher level from the ends of education in general. Also known as the “Rockfish Gap” report, it distinguishes “primary” and “higher” education. The former provides for the citizen who “observes with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed.” Accordingly, it called for instructing “the mass of our citizens in [their] rights, interests and duties, as men and citizens.” Wherefore one learns “to calculate, to communicate ideas, contents, accounts, and writing, to improve moral faculties (by reading), to observe duties to neighbors and country, to know his rights, and to choose wisely the delegates to represent him.” This is the standard of lower or “primary” education. It is notable that, today, as at the origins of the contemporary discussion of general education in higher education, we often hear similar recitations (applied, however, rather to the *highest* than to the *primary* level of education!).

What lay beyond this standard in the “Rockfish Gap” report was the goal “to form the statesmen, legislators, and judges on whom prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend” – that is, a truly higher education. Students educated to this higher level were “to expound the principles and structures of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation.” People so educated would “harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufacture, and commerce.” They would, moreover, “develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals.” They would “enlighten them with mathematical and physical science, which advance the arts, and administer to the health, the subsistence, and comforts of life; and generally, to form the habits of reflection and correct action...”

Thus, we see elucidated a series of professions directly to be prepared by general education at the higher level. Those professions entail law, agriculture, industry, com-

merce, and, most emphatically, teaching. In short, the end of general education at the higher level is to provide for education and support at the primary level. The goals announced for primary education will be attained only in proportion as advanced goals are attained in higher education. General education in higher education is the cement that makes possible a credible primary or pre-collegiate education that will, in turn, assure the development of able republican citizens who will act with intelligence and faithfulness.

GOAL OF GENERAL EDUCATION

Not the lesser goal of cultural familiarity but the noble goal of ability to direct and form culture (excellence in judgment) was the aim of general education as originally described in the official declarations of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Much has changed since that time, including the massification of higher education. That has required us to revisit the definition of general education.

Heretofore, however, we have done so only silently, accepting a tacit restatement that likens or reduces the goal of college and university education to what was previously envisioned as the goal of primary education – mere good citizenship. That may be a reasonable course to follow where ideals of access to higher education render less tenable the expectation that higher education will systematically produce “statesmen, legislators, and judges.” But two questions must flow from such a conclusion for every genuine academic leader.

First, is there a successor to the former higher education, which assures the ability to provide the newly defined primary education? So much of the discussion of reform in teacher education addresses our deficiencies in this regard. Second, do we adhere even to the more modest version of general education in our colleges and universities today?

Perhaps the most shocking thing a commentator could say about prevailing practices in general education in colleges and universities today, whether in Virginia or elsewhere in the United States, is that a tariff duty on foreign books would scarcely cause a ripple in our general education curricula. The pattern of offerings we discover upon review reveals little opportunity for comparative assessment with reference to the attainments of those thought most advanced.

To its credit we may say that American scholarship today is as frequently the intellectual standard as foreign scholarship. To our discredit there is little evidence that general education curricula foster much familiarity with cutting edges in scholarship, whether American or foreign.

To take the most obvious case, almost nowhere does there exist any general education curriculum in which the study of foreign language can be expected to foster anything more than a tourist’s gloss on a foreign language. To be sure, many a foreign language major will have discovered an interest awakening in an elementary language course intended initially only to satisfy a general education requirement. That is some-

thing gained. The intensive study of foreign languages, however, is not a growth industry in the academy.

Moreover, the evolution of general education courses as mainly the most general, introductory study preparatory to initiating specialized study in a major strengthens the presumption that there is no intrinsic virtue to general education itself – it is a means to the end of specialization more often than it is a substantive contribution to a student’s understanding. Instruction in mathematics, like that in foreign languages, illustrates this ably. Indeed, a pervasive practice has emerged that isolates the handful of eventual majors in mathematics from all other students, who seldom acquire more than a sprinkling under showers effectively labeled “mathematics for the unfamiliar.”

The guiding question in assessing general education is not how comprehensive is the list of offerings at a college or university. It is far rather, how effective an analyst of the structures of government the mathematics major is and how effective an analyst of mathematics is the political science major?

We cannot take great encouragement about the answers to those questions from contemporary performances. The importance of this stems from the fact that we read current practice in light of the requirement that general education produce, not proficient specialists, but rather “intelligent and faithful citizens” and, to the extent possible, “statesmen, legislators, and judges.”

It has long been recognized as insufficient to think of “statesmen, legislators, and judges” as merely proficient specialists.¹⁵ But a brief discussion of “critical thinking” will make clear the distinction between the civilizing talent, judgment, and mere talent. Proficient specialists are talented, indeed, but unless their specialties entail judgment across disciplines and needs, they are not talented enough to lead communities and they cannot qualify to lead colleges and universities. For this reason, we ought to ponder as well the goals and standards of higher education against the background of what it is not: mere critical thinking.

CONCLUSION: FROM CRITICAL THINKING TO PROFICIENT HUMANITY

If we apply the case I have made for general education as a test of academic leadership and excellence in judgment, we will encounter a further question that needs to be resolved: namely, why critical thinking is too narrow a goal for higher education. They err who place “critical thinking” in the role that has been reserved for “thinking” and “judgment.” The point of higher education as opposed to any more utilitarian training is to enable the eventual adept to be able to distinguish in each case the good and the bad and the right and the wrong.

¹⁵ Butler in Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 75: “It is only for the professions or executive positions in business that it is necessary to be able to reason logically from cause to effect and to possess special training such as colleges are best able to give. Unless a young person has the ability to think, and not merely to memorize and empirically to apply rules, as well as a special aptitude for the callings just mentioned, he should not be allowed to attend a public-supported college or university.”

To the end of answering that question and illustrating the character of judgment that is most required for academic leadership, I will lean on the important work of Ronald Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. To place that work in its proper context, however, it is important first to comprehend the claims most generally made for “critical thinking,” which now is frequently resorted to by academics in the United States and abroad as the most highly valued “transferable skill” provided by higher education.¹⁶

An example of the kind of understanding that attaches to the invocation of “critical thinking” is that provided by Martha Nussbaum, in her *Cultivating Humanity*.¹⁷ Her “political science student, Anna” found herself unprepared to work in China by reason of having failed to take courses that exposed her to a diversity of cultural practices: “Her imaginative capacity to enter the lives of people of other nations had been blunted by lack of practice.” Nussbaum believes that the kind of “critical thinking” that would make one a more sensitive judge of different cultures is achieved primarily through “introduction” to cultural differences, as opposed to mature intellectual performance.

This is where Barnett’s work is significant, for he carefully differentiates “critical thinking” from “critical thought,” arguing that excellence in thought and judgment is the true goal of education (rather than mere familiarization). Among the defects of the familiarization approach, he argued, is to “leave our students sensing that there is a givenness to the knowledge structures that they are encountering or that those structures are socially neutral.”

Barnett’s agenda is to assure that higher education aim for the regenerative power of “symbolic creation” (or pushing the frontiers of knowledge) as opposed to the mere analysis or manipulation of symbols (*à la* Robert Reich).

This refocuses our thinking on the ends of education, and it is beyond the scope of these remarks to follow Barnett through his encounters with postmodernism and the forms of university organization in the contemporary world.

We do need, however, to pay close attention to two of the most striking conclusions. First, Barnett specifically maintains that deep familiarity with a “single intellectual field” is superior to a “superficial encounter” with diverse subjects or disciplines. If “cognitive transformation” is our end, as it should be, then our attention must be focused on levels of intellectual accomplishment more than on ranges of intellectual exposure. For that purpose, we require to identify and adhere to “critical standards.”

Secondly, such intellectual maturity may be accomplished only on the strength of universal standards or principles:

¹⁶ Ronald Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business* (Bristol, PA: SRHE and Open University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), chapter two, “Citizens of the World.”

But these are large claims and they open up a number of large problems... it could mean that there are cross-disciplinary critical standards to which we could resort. The first possibility is that of linking territories together, if only in a piecemeal way. This is the Bailey's bridge route to critical reconstruction: creating new linkages but probably of a limited and temporary character. The second possibility is the cartographer's route in which we detect new connections in the map of knowledge, local territories being seen to be part of a new and larger map of the whole territory. [p. 28]

The second possibility, that which envisions connecting the diverse strands of a continuing conversation across the ages, is the one that opens for us the door to a fuller understanding of the requisites of academic leadership. Higher education aims for each student to connect the conversations of fundamental inquiry.

Moreover, it is plausible to maintain that the advance of society or civilization is directly tied to our ability to connect the conversations regarding being and knowing. In that regard, the multiversity cannot be allowed to descend further into "discrete academic subcultures" without rendering itself inert for the task of sustaining social momentum.

It falls to academic leaders to express whether a relationship may be maintained "between transferable skills and critical thought."

One response is that, in themselves, transferable skills are neutral in regard to critical thought... Critical thought, after all, could be critical of transferable skills. But that view begs questions... An individual might be – we can be charitable – skilled in her transferable skills, but will not be furnished thereby with the capacity to critique the surroundings. The skill lies in the competence to perform instrumentally and not in the capacity to form a deep understanding of her environment and to critique it. As policy and as educational project, critique is doubly written out of transferable skills. (p. 39)

In permitting the emergence of transferable skills at the expense of "critical thought," universities permit the "instrumental, the technological, and the performative" to sideline the "hermeneutic, the liberal and the contemplative." What we see in the university, he maintains, is a passing from "a hermeneutic mode of communication" to "an instrumental mode of communication." Now, our chief communicators are our academic leaders. Hence, the burden of justifying this change, or of arresting it, must fall to them.

It is also important to observe that Barnett does not fail to take into account the massive changes occurring in the modern university, including democratization, virtualizing, and consumerizing. The question, however, is whether in this age of change we must say, "goodbye, higher education as discipline; hello, higher education as play, as extension of popular culture."

It will now be clear why this discussion of critical thinking is pertinent to our discussion of academic leadership and the curriculum of the university. Nowhere is the instrumental view of critical thinking more consistently invoked than through the lips of university presidents. They doubtless do not see themselves participating in a post-modernist rejection of universal standards.¹⁸ Perhaps, though, they can be led to see that they thereby abandon disciplinary standards and put at risk higher education's role in cultivating excellence in judgment as its distinctive contribution to society.

What we require of academic leaders is that they be able to speak intelligently about this process of change that engulfs all of higher education, and that they demonstrate in their conversation about it the specific excellence in judgment that qualifies them for their offices. We recognize that they must perform this work in an environment of heightened transparency, as the organizational imperatives of modern university life have changed. They must provide the "accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness" the present demand-oriented environment provides for, even while practicing substantive, hermeneutic leadership.

[Universities] have become organizations separately and they have become – in the formation of a state-sponsored system of higher education – a kind of collective mega-organization. Within universities, planning, management information, budgeting, target setting, efficiency savings, devolved budgeting and accountability measures become taken for granted as aspects of managing a modern university.¹⁹

I observed in *The 1999 Virginia Plan: Advancing the System of Higher Education in Virginia* that the state, the public, does not invent, albeit it certainly uses, higher education.²⁰ The point of that observation is to underscore the extent to which the university must transcend the political organization of the society and therefore the extent to which the academic leader must protect the university's integrity even while responding to the political imperatives that often drive planning in the modern university.

¹⁸ Op. Cit., Barnett, p. 29: "Why is the postmodern view so determined to drive out all belief in anything that smacks of the universal? At bottom, there is a fear of terror. The view is that any attempt to identify elements of human action or thinking – whether in the form of knowledge, bodies of thought, ethical principles, modes of language and communication, or forms of life – amounts, ultimately, to totalitarianism. My suggesting that you should assent to this view of the world or these moral principles because they have some kind of objectivity or general applicability to them amounts to a form of dictatorship. It is tantamount to my saying: really, you have no choice in the matter. This is the way the world is. You can't even take it or leave it: you have to take it. You might not see the world the way I do or readily assent to these moral principles. Nevertheless, because I am more insightful than you, or because I have considered these matters more carefully, it so happen that the picture of the world I am putting before you is not just my view – it has universal validity."

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰ *The 1999 Virginia Plan: Advancing the System of Higher Education in Virginia* (Richmond, VA: State Council of Higher Education, 1999). <http://www.schev.edu/Reportstats/genedstudy.pdf?from=>

Higher education aims most comprehensively to eventuate in proficient humanity, and if proficient humanity entails not just the capacity for but the practice of intelligent judgment across the range of human circumstances, then higher education must aim to foster such judgment.

Judgment on this order involves not only distinguishing the correct and the incorrect, the good and the bad, the fit and the unfit, and the right and the wrong across the extraordinary range of unique individual situations that constitute human life, but it entails the ready expression of such judgments.

The ready expression of such judgments cannot result from any practice other than the application of consistent rules. Where any two particulars are separately equal to any third particular, the foregoing two must be equal to each other. No issue of taste, choice, background, or inclination may be allowed to intrude upon that rule-based conclusion. In that sense proficient judgment results from proficiency in thinking, and not the mere assertion of preferences even when preferences are informed by comparative awareness of the preferences of others or the consequences for others.

Because human situations are relative, it is all the more important that proficient judgment be rule-based. Judgment across the range of variable circumstances cannot be trusted if judgment may vary as the situations or circumstances vary. It is the purpose of the rule to support the adequacy of judgment in every particular circumstance.

Accordingly, rule-based thinking is the goal of higher education, and rule-based thinking may be contrasted with critical thinking wherever critical thinking is not formally understood to be rule-based thinking. An example of critical thinking that is not formally understood to be rule-based thinking is that which encourages proteges to express tastes, choices, or inclinations on the strength of broad information about all relevant tastes, choices, or inclinations but without requiring a demonstration of the propriety of particular tastes, choices, or inclinations. However admirable it may be, that individuals would pay attention to the needs of other individuals before insisting on their own, it remains true that their own needs must still be defended by rational argument and are subject to be judged as fit or unfit, good or bad, correct or incorrect, and right or wrong.

Otherwise, critical thinking would eventuate in nothing more than the comparative weighing of the intensities of competing appetites. It is better to take competing appetites into account before insisting on just one appetite. But the one appetite is not better just for being the last one adhered to. Unless it can satisfy rule-based evaluation, it must be treated as mere appetite, irrational, and not worthy to be admitted. The prostitute that selects the healthiest of a number of prospective clients doubtlessly acts sensibly. But when it is clear that she would still select the most scrofulous if the only client, it is clear that her proficiency in comparing possibilities is not informed by a preference of good over bad and right over wrong.

The point of higher education as opposed to any more utilitarian training is to enable the eventual adept to distinguish in each case the good and the bad and the right and

the wrong. The challenge of academic leadership is to demonstrate ceaselessly the centrality of this work and its enduring cultural value.

The goal of higher education, again, is to foster tough judgments under the guidance of high standards. The specific challenge to academic leaders is to apply such tough judgments and rigorous standards in their own work. Proficient specialists are capable of doing just this within the narrow range of disciplinary interests. Proficient humanity performs at this level across the range of human interests. Higher education aims at proficient humanity via the route of integrated inquiry. That goal, integrated inquiry, needs to inform the mission of the university if it is to play its role in generating proficient humanity. To sacrifice that role to the liberal arts college (which disproportionately produces our research faculty²¹) may be a workable proposition, structurally, but it has consequences for vast numbers of our citizens that ought to be unacceptable to all us.

Finally, in reply to the sensible inquiry, what, then would such a curriculum look like, I provide the following outline of a curriculum leading to excellence in judgment. The pre-supposition of this curriculum is an adequate pre-collegiate education, but it requires only further elaboration rather than abandonment in the face of different and more challenging realities.

A Course of Higher Education

Rather than to build on merely private motives or arbitrary conceptions of a higher education, and avoiding recourse to the merely classical, let us begin by recapitulating the standards conveyed in the “Rockfish Gap” report.

Providing for the citizen who “observes with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed,” it called for instructing “the mass of our citizens in [their] rights, interests and duties, as men and citizens.” This meant primary teaching of how “to calculate, to communicate ideas, contents, accounts, and writing, to improve moral faculties (by reading), to observe duties to neighbors and country, to know his rights, and to choose wisely the delegates to represent him.” Let us make these, then, the givens with which every scholar begins a higher education. No university should have to expect anything less than this range of knowledges, competencies, and habits in a fresh student.

Since “higher education” must build on this secure foundation, it surely aims at attainments considerably beyond these estimable ones. That makes it reasonable to aim “to form the statesmen, legislators, and judges on whom prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend.” Such persons will be able “to expound the principles and structures of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation.” They know how to “harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufacture, and commerce.” These results derive from studies that “develop the reasoning faculties of

²¹ This well established fact has been reported for several years through the surveys reported by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

our youth, enlarge their minds, [and] cultivate their morals.” They “enlighten them with mathematical and physical science, which advance the arts, and administer to the health, the subsistence, and comforts of life; and generally...form the habits of reflection and correct action...”

It is not difficult to name the subjects of study that produce these results. They begin with disciplined study in languages, arts, and sciences, progress through advanced study in history and social science, and culminate in literatures, philosophy, and law-regulated activities (which encompasses the disciplines from legal studies to physics, to sculpture).

Throughout such a curriculum, students will write and speak frequently and extensively. They will have arrived prepared to do so (or else must speedily be made capable of doing so).

The language study will be important, even when they have had prior language training, for their grasp of foreign languages needs to proceed apace with their increasing intellectual agility. In the arts they must study the history of republicanism (in which United States history must be central) specifically and human history more broadly. Natural history will be no less important. And advanced mathematics will bridge the arts and the sciences (or natural history). Students should have arrived with advanced algebra at a minimum, and be ready to proceed through probability, calculus, and linear analysis.

In their second and third years they should continue and perfect their introductory studies to the extent necessary, but should also be engaged in rigorous historical and social scientific analysis (which must include scientific as well as social architectures). Then in their final year (assuming a four year course of study rather than the five that would be appropriate if students were to begin earlier or less well prepared), they should seriously engage in integrative patterns of study, which would emphasize close study of literature, the practice rather than the survey of philosophy, and the study (and/or practice) of what I choose to call “law-regulated” activities. These last include the range of specifically human activities and professions that are subject to disciplined development in accord with clearly established procedures for validation. Here the student will rather study one or some than all of the possible disciplines, and to the extent the course of study permits it, such study may begin in the third year. Because the rudiments of these studies should have been well conveyed in the prior general curriculum, students should begin at levels appreciably advanced beyond current practice.

The goal of such a curriculum is that proficient humanity that is characterized by excellence in judgment. It does not intend to produce “professionals” (with the exception of teachers and of these it should produce generous numbers). Nor does it intend to produce disciplinary adepts. It does assure students well prepared to advance in graduate study in chosen fields. More importantly, it assures the aim of the “Rockfish Gap” report, namely, statesmen, legislators, and judges. For these persons are best prepared on the basis of general knowledge of human arts and culture.