

Address to the Faculty on Curriculum Change

(Delivered at the Faculty Retreat)

Final Part of Series
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A proposal I would like to make is that we consider the possibilities of constructing a program with a large component of history. I have spoken previously about why I think history is important but would like to say a bit more. While we must be primarily concerned that students learn to think about large and serious questions, we must also take seriously what they study.

There are clearly some matters which are more important than other matters. It seems obvious to me that we can handle the matter of process, of learning to think, discuss, and write with a variety of materials in each discipline. If that is the case, we should do so while reading the most important available material.

My contention is that the prospective of history is essential to education and, therefore, that we ought to consider how to include that element at every possible occasion. The classical literature in every field has an importance which contemporary literature cannot have.

There are fields in which most of the literature is fairly contemporary and there are fields in which most of the attention in a major program must be on what is current, but we have neglected the past and there is a danger there. In my field if I had to choose I would rather a student read *The Iliad*, Greek Drama and Dostoyevski, even though these works must all be read in translation, than that he read Thomas Wolf, Hemmingway or Faulkner (excuse me, Dick Morton). Our larger culture has been built on those works in which mankind has struggled to define itself philosophically, religiously, socially, politically, and otherwise. If those works are truly great, they will not only provide insights into human history which we need, but the issues raised there should continue to hold their currency.

I am suggesting, then, that we ought to design our distribution program to meet definable intellectual needs, that while we should be concerned for developing interests and skills, on the one hand, we should, on the other, also focus attention, where possible, on the classics of our fields. I am not at all convinced that the introductory

course which is appropriate for a beginning major is naturally the course which should fulfill the purposes of general education. A science course which may be involved almost entirely with minute particulars of dissection and extensive memory work or a literature course which is devoted to contemporary authors may well serve a major who needs information and specialized skills, but these courses as *the* courses for a non-major may have little value when compared to what might be done. We have attempted to solve some of the problems presented by introductory courses with the broader concerns of BHTC 101, but that was a solution

arrived at partly in despair at solving the problems on a more satisfactory basis, which would involve more carefully designed courses for the core and distribution requirements.

I will make one other suggestion: we ought to concern ourselves with developing programs to increase the writing skills of our students. Writing, like history, is too complex and important to leave to one department. It is perfectly obvious to me that only in writing (or some equivalent symbolic system) do we really discover what we are capable of thinking in a sustained fashion. Writing is a process of discovery. Through writing, and only through it, do we refine our perceptions and connect them sequentially and logically. The student who cannot write cannot develop certain sorts of thinking processes, and those are the very processes which are central to educational progress and sophistication. I am convinced that we need college wide programs designed to keep writing a central focus of concern. Every teacher at some point ought to be engaged in teaching writing. One of our serious problems now is the number of students unwilling to engage in writing, which is to say engage in sustained thinking. And among the worst are seniors. I had a senior from another field drop my already impoverished course in Renaissance Drama because there are to be two short papers and larger research project which might or might not involve extensive writing. I had reduced my usual expectations just to avoid such consequences. I need students, but this person has forcefully instructed me

that to pull in students wanting electives that I had better give up writing assignments altogether. I have had yet worse experiences. I have seen a set of term papers by upperclassmen all of which I would have failed. Martha Cooley has seniors dropping European History because she makes writing assignments. If students, particularly upper classmen, are afraid to take desired courses in subjects because they lack writing skills, we must, for that reason alone, and there are better ones, take the problem seriously. I suggest that every department develop a program involving increasing sophistication in writing. I know Political Science has done that. We particularly need to build such an element into the distribution requirement. Writing instruction should not be left to the English and BHTC courses.

I have been addressing myself to educational ideals.

I have not attempted to speak to the practical problems of implementing them. I do think that there is a real value in considering general propositions. Constraints of all sorts hedge us in, particularly those of institutional need. We will, of course, make some decisions for purely practical reasons, but our sense of what is practical is never simply economic. All practical decisions ought to be strategic in furthering our ideals, and so the identification of ideals must not be neglected.

My concerns here are not really centered on what requirement to drop or bolster up. I am less interested in which departments have how much of the pie than in what we do with the students wherever we have them. From my own private perspective I would probably prefer that a student take a course in philosophy than one in economics, but I would rather he take the right sort of economics course

than the wrong sort of philosophy course. For myself, I would rather take the economics course since I know a little of philosophy and nothing of economics. But, we should be sure that the core and distribution requirements have conscious intentions. I think they require conscious intentions to be at all justified in educational terms. I think it would be fruitful for us to discuss such possibilities. I think we could build better major programs if we did have clearer intentions in our general program.

Right now I am not convinced that we know exactly where we are, where we have been, where we are going, or how we should act. But I do believe that the faculty is the strongest and most open faculty we have had in at least fifteen years and, consequently, that we have never been in a better position to consider these matters.

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"This coming holiday season you can help the poorest of the poor families around the world by sending special greetings to relatives, friends and business associates through CARE's seasonal gift card plan," Frank L. Goffio, Executive Director of the international aid and development agency, said today.

"Attractive CARE announcement holiday greeting cards inform each person on your list that you have given to CARE in his or her honor to help others suffering from hunger, poverty, disease," Goffio explained. "In more than 30 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, your gift to CARE helps destitute families not just to survive but also to work their way out of poverty.

"The aid you help provide includes food for hungry children and materials, equipment and training for villagers to build schools, water systems, health and nutrition centers — plus vital agricultural projects to grow more food. And via CARE-MEDICO you help send physicians and nurses to teach modern medical methods that will save many thousands of lives year after year."

Send the names and addresses on your gift list, with a contribution for each card, to CARE, Dept. HOL, Box 13043, Atlanta Georgia 30324. CARE will send the cards to you, or, if you want them mailed directly to the person being honored, indicate how the cards should be signed. Allow time for mailing.

Goffio cited some examples

of how much good contributions can do: \$5 serves up to 30 children a daily bowl of nourishing porridge for a month; \$15 builds space for two more children in a rural school; \$25 provides a group of farmers training to grow more food, or gives thousands of children nutritious food, helping them grow into healthy, productive adults.

"For every dollar donated by the public," Goffio stated, "CARE last year delivered over nine dollars worth of aid. This was made possible by contributions of food by the U.S. and other governments and by sharing operating costs overseas with host agencies. This season share the joys of the holiday by helping those who need it most to help themselves."

