



Answer to academic woes is not curriculum reform

Any curriculum reforms are useless if the faculty charged with teaching under the new curriculum is incapable of teaching qualitatively. I am assuming that mediocrity is not Meredith's academic objective but that excellence is. That is why I chuckle over the new curriculum proposed by the Sub-Committee on Curriculum reform (see *The TWIG* page 1, January 22, 1976). Many of the sub-committee's suggestions are pipe dreams because the courses they recommend to fulfill curriculum goals are taught by faculty members who do not present the course material adequately. Other suggestions blatantly indicate that they were made to circumvent impotent departments. Sublimation of necessary departments is not going to solve Meredith's academic problems. Rather such action would increase the academic problems because Meredith would then be graduating majors in departments even weaker than before. Excellence will not be achieved through such redefining, renaming or restructuring of mediocre curriculum offerings.

We can evaluate, we can hem, we can haw, we can reevaluate indefinitely, but the fact remains Meredith has too few faculty positions to be able to support incompetent professors or to encourage department heads who are victims of the Peter Principle.

Students should not have to juggle their schedule or change their major to avoid weak faculty members or departments. Many students do this and suffer through mediocre courses. The college's exceptional graduates are those who are for the most part self educated or are those students who restricted themselves as best they could to the strong portions of the Meredith curriculum. I could name the names of the people and departments I indict, perhaps I should, but everyone, it seems, can think of examples without a list here. Most names can be derived through analysis of the faculty evaluations distributed at the end of last year.

Is it idealistic to consider a college as a business, with the graduate as the product and the parents, students and benefactors as stockholders? The faculty and administration would be the mechanism, of this business image, which transforms the entering student into a finished product. Meredith reaches its production goals quantitatively but not qualitatively. The college is, though, ideally responsible to its 'stockholders' to graduate well educated students in all departments, from all courses. Otherwise its reputation as a strong liberal arts college is farcical. Many of Meredith's student 'products', are faulty or poorly developed or are at best not as good as they might be if Meredith salary dollars were maximized to promote a strong faculty. Meredith's faculty is, in certain areas, exceptional, but the few weak members and the few weak departments are undermining the curriculum as a whole.

We should not have majors which do not teach students their field. Students should not have to go outside the college curriculum to seek experiences which give them knowledge necessary to an understanding of their major.

The administration needs to sit down and to analyze each department's and each faculty member's strengths and weaknesses. The strengths need to be buttressed and weaknesses remedied. All faculty members need to be encouraged more actively to keep their disciplinary knowledge current. Our best faculty members are those who know and relate to course content what is happening in their field and in their sub-fields today. Some irredeemable faculty members should be encouraged to find academic or non-academic situations elsewhere. Their faults should be analyzed so that hiring mistakes will not be repeated.

Only when we have strong personnel can we have the strong liberal arts curriculum the Curriculum Committee seeks and the students desire.

AKV

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Member Associated Collegiate Press. Published weekly except during holidays and exams. THE TWIG is served by National Educational Advertising Service, 18 East 50th Street, New York. Subscription rates: \$3.70

A wholistic education? The wheck you say!

In the educational philosophy set forth in the proposal from the Task Force for Curricular Reform, the statement is made that Meredith "requires certain courses of all its students in order that they may graduate with a wholistic view of their life directions."

Apart from academic discussion on whether to spell the word "wholistic", "holistic", or to use a less technical word completely, little attention has been given to whether the new basic curriculum unifies the educational experience or fragments it even more.

Courses are distributed over five areas: communication skills, understanding human values and value systems, appreciation of one's physical self, understanding society, and understanding the natural universe.

Such a structure ostensibly breaks down the old "humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences" categories, thus making the curricular requirements more unified or whole.

An example of the resulting wholeness is the spread of the study of English and literature over three

categories, as the student takes English composition for communication skills, British Authors to understand human values, and a literature course in any language to understand society.

Evidence of the old structure remains, however. One still takes math and science courses to understand the natural universe, social science courses to understand society, religion courses to understand human values, and physical education courses to appreciate the body.

What the new structure implies is that religion or humanities courses add nothing to a student's understanding either of her physical self, her society, or the universe in which she lives. It assumes that the logic of mathematics is not transferable to the logic of philosophy and that courses which add to our understanding of society and the natural universe add nothing to our understanding of values.

Certainly no serious student would limit herself from making obvious applications from one field of study to another. A "wholistic" view is a whole

view which looks to all available knowledge from all available ways of knowing.

Perhaps the student who makes her correlations and associations among the disciplines is not any better off with the traditional divisions of "humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences." But when she enters a religion, sociology, or biology course, she is open to the impression that she will be learning a method of knowing and not just rounding out a specific area of knowledge or understanding.

The problem with the proposed curriculum reform is that it is only an external manipulation of the courses. No amount of categorizing and shifting is going to change the fact that course material will of necessity be handled in a fragmented way. It will always be up to the student herself to make the body of her knowledge whole, holy, or wholly relevant to her life.

If, as Dr. Horner was quoted in last week's *TWIG*, "we like pretty well the kinds of things Meredith is doing...", then why meddle with them?

Maggie Odell

Policy change has been a constant theme for years

Twelve years ago, Meredith had a dancing policy, an on- and off-campus dress code, a required daily 'chapel' and a point system whereby bedrooms and bathrooms were checked for tidiness after 10 am. These policies and the evolution toward their abolition present images of a College different from Meredith today.

This evolution of policy can be studied through consultation of the current Handbook and of a study on "Major Changes in Social Regulations" compiled by the Dean of Students office in 1974.

Meredith no longer has a dancing policy. In 1964-65, however, students were not permitted to hold dances on campus or to dance with men on campus. Students could

attend dances within a thirty-five mile radius and only if they were sponsored by "approved organizations or institutions." Students could not attend dances open to the "general public." In 1969-70, the Dancing Policy was deleted and on-campus mixers and the Christmas Dance became annual traditions.

The dress code, the anathema of SGA's for many years was abolished in 1974-75 except for the vestigial policy that students not wear jeans to Sunday lunches.

The 1964-65 Dress Code prescribed specific dress for different occasions and stated that "At all times appropriate and socially acceptable standards of dress are expected of Meredith students. At Meredith, we enjoy the

reputation of being neatly dressed. It is part of our educational program. We are proud of this distinction and feel certain that its continuation is a vital part of maintaining our present status in the Raleigh community."

In 1970-71 this statement was removed from the handbook as was the appropriate dress list and was substituted with the sole restriction that rollers not be worn at Saturday or Sunday lunch in the Dining Hall or during the week.

Meal by meal the roller restriction was removed until it was totally abolished in 1974-75.

Required convocation, too, has been abolished. In 1964-65, students were

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