The Liberal Arts College

BY

Henry M. Wriston
THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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It is always a difficult matter to draw the line between principle and accommodation. Compromise gradually eats the substance of principle; erosion goes forward to a place where principle is destroyed without the compromiser knowing what he has lost. On the other hand principles adhered to with too severe rigidity may well defeat their own purposes by want of adaptation to the hard realities of environment.

The liberal arts colleges have been in a sad dilemma. It is the dilemma of principle against environment. They have been living in a highly materialistic environment. Yet they stand for nothing material. If they are to achieve their basic purpose, the liberal arts colleges cannot emphasize technological improvement; they cannot participate importantly in the advance of applied science; the goal is not professional improvement, or even more adequate technical training of teachers. In an age when civilization is defined in material goods, when progress has been measured by economic standards, when people have been judged by the amount of money they could make, standing for nothing material has been, and still is, a difficult position.

The dilemma of the last ten years, in which the colleges have found themselves, is not the simple classical dilemma, with two horns. It is as spiny as a cactus. One of those spines upon which the college is impaled has been localism in education. The theory of democracy has nowhere gained such currency, such devoted adherence, as in education. The public high school is the outstanding manifestation of that philosophy; and the public high school is, inevitably, local. Whereas one hundred years ago the characteristic student in secondary school left his home and went to a boarding school, today the characteristic student in secondary school lives at home.

The same sort of development has been going on more and more rapidly in the college world. Fifty years ago, and even at the turn of the century one generation ago, the characteristic college was located in the country and the students lived at the college. In the last generation, however, literally hundreds of junior colleges have grown up, nearly all based upon the idea that students would live at home, and upon the further idea that the college, consequently, must serve that community. Great urban universities have developed. Colleges have grown in proportion to
their immediate environment, so that the Methodist Survey, for example, studied the area and population to be served. Indeed, that feature was studied, at least so it seemed to me, much more intensively and discriminatingly than the specific differentiated functions of the several institutions. Statistically it is probably true that the majority of college students in America now live at home rather than in the college.

Naturally enough, if you draw your students from a certain area, particularly a specific and limited area, you will be expected to serve all the students who come from that area. Common locality of residence, however, by no means implies uniformity of purpose, similarity of aim, or common objectives. So we have been taking into the colleges people of the widest possible divergences of aptitude and interest. To serve all these diverse interests, we have been tempted to be all things to all men within the area from which our students are principally drawn.

This tendency has been accentuated by another aspect of our dilemma. Except for a few state institutions peculiarly situated, institutions of higher education everywhere have become more and more dependent upon student fees. Legislatures have been reducing appropriations; the income from endowments has been falling. As one becomes more and more dependent upon student fees, there is a strong incentive to set more and more bait for students. Again the temptation is to be all things to all men, in an effort to draw more students, who will pay more fees into the institution.

These are only a few of the horns of the dilemma of the liberal arts college. When they are stated thus baldly and in series, it seems obvious that the institutions should have offered stout resistance. They should have clung to their principles; they should have maintained their integrity. They should never have yielded to these environmental pressures. But the pressures were not exerted in the bald way in which they have been described. They were rationalized as integral elements of a broad program. Science, for example, was not given its place in the curriculum as vocational training but was called a way of life as, indeed, it may be. Too often, however, it was taught not so much as a way of life but as a way of making a living. "Certainly one cannot scold a professor, who is making a living teaching science, for teaching it as a way of making a living. He might be thought to be something less than loyal to his own ideals were he to do differently." So ran the argument. Each deviation from the liberal arts ideal was explained with great plausibility; nonetheless, each added to the confusion. Therefore, it is in no critical or censorious spirit that I say that a college of liberal arts which has a clear perception of its function and of the means for discharging that function is a rarity in American life.

I should like this evening simply to give expression to a per-
sonal point of view which has been developing for some years. I would state as plainly as possible the function of the liberal arts college and search for the reflection of that function in the structure of the curriculum.

The liberal arts college should be an institution devoted exclusively to the personal development of its students while in college. They should be developed intellectually, ethically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. The central function of the university is to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge and press back the frontiers of truth. It has a great teaching office but that phase of its work, great as it is, nonetheless, is subordinate to its research activities. The technical school within or without a university and the professional school, whether it be a teachers college, a school of medicine, or a vocational school for the training of artisans has, as the center of its obligations, training in the practice of some art. There are, of course, wide areas wherein these institutions overlap, but there are significant areas wherein they do not overlap, and always and everywhere their emphases are essentially different.

It is obvious, for example, that many people develop their personalities in universities and in technical and professional schools. It is obvious that colleges should seek for truth, and that the faculties should make their adequate contribution to expanding the boundaries of knowledge. Unless, however, we set up, as a principle, that the college is devoted wholly to the maturation of personality, the college will renounce its distinctive quality. The argument which will be raised at once is that this exclusive emphasis upon the present meaning of life, this refusal to train for the future, is a luxury. Students cannot afford either the time or the money for an experience which gets them nowhere vocationally, and which turns them out after four years as perfect parlor specimens but not of much use in the workaday world. That argument we have all heard again and again. It is built upon an assumption which is wholly out of accord with the facts. Anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with human experience will instantly admit that vastly more people are economically inefficient because of personal deficiencies than because of shortcomings in vocational training. I do not hesitate for a moment to say that economically, if one must put everything in material terms, there is no better investment than a liberal arts course, if the fruits thereof are garnered. The contention that I want to make tonight is that we should take care of the soil, its cultivation and fertilization. We should prune the tree; we should spray the leaves; we should do whatever is necessary and appropriate to bring our fruit to a rich and full maturity.

Quite apart from the argument, which I think cannot be gainsaid, that vocational efficiency depends more upon matured per-
sonality than upon specific training, it ought to be pointed out that there are thousands and thousands of vocations for which no specific training is available. Training in those vocations depends upon a kind of formal or informal apprenticeship wherein the individual learns as he works. It does not need elaborate argument upon my part to convince you that he learns best and most effectively who has developed the habit of learning, who knows how to integrate his new learning with what he has learned before, who looks upon his work with a philosophical comprehension which makes it meaningful in his own life.

Carry the argument a step further. Suppose one wishes to enter the law or medicine or some other profession or vocation which requires specific training. It has been said again and again that a student cannot afford the time for four years in a liberal arts college before entering upon that training. That continues to be said despite the fact that we have been producing so many professional men that a large percentage of them are in penury. We have turned out so many teachers that Chicago can starve them with impunity. We have turned out so many engineers that their economic plight is one of the conspicuous tragedies of the day. We are abolishing child labor; we are keeping young people out of industry; we are doing everything we can, as a nation, to postpone entrance into economic life as self-sustaining individuals. Despite all that we do to postpone vocational activities, it still remains true that men rise to positions of power and influence at extraordinarily young ages. Where there is richness and depth of personality the roads to advancement are open for travel at modern speeds.

Not every high school student, of course, has the aptitude, the desire, or the resources to have this experience and profit by it. On the other hand, when it can be said with impunity, in a discussion of the proposed merger of Chicago and Northwestern, that it is an "obvious fact that ninety per cent of all students regard higher education as a business investment", (The Reverend John Evans, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, January 7) then there is a serious distortion in educational life. The ten per cent remaining for the liberal arts ideal is by far too small a proportion of the total.

The whole argument against the liberal arts college on the ground that it is an economic waste, or an economic luxury, or economically inefficient, breaks down of its own weight. The greatest failure in the current world is the failure to see the whole situation and to deal with it as a whole. The world does not lack experts; it lacks philosophers. In every profession, and in business, it is indisputable that technical proficiency has run beyond philosophical outlook, ethical impulse, political capacity, and social responsibility. It is not enough to have expert bankers who deal with the banking situation, and a separate group who handle the
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monetary situation, still another who are concerned with international trade, others who think in terms of international armament, etc. Deep and fundamental issues are issues involving synthesis. To that capacity for philosophical synthesis, the college is devoted.

If one turns from economic to political considerations the argument for the liberal arts college becomes even more overwhelming. As was well said in the report on “State Higher Education in California” (Page 18) “Failure of citizens to understand many of our current problems and their tragic inability to co-operate in the solution of them constitute one cause that has led to breakdowns in our current civilization.” The United States has embarked upon a democratic experiment unparalleled in scope, size, complexity, and significance. The solvent which is to bring all our problems into common terms is education.

As the problems have become more complex and as the rate of change has accelerated, education has, of course, become broader and more extensive in time. In the static agricultural era or in the simple pioneering days the three R’s might suffice, and individualism might make democracy function with a minimum of government. Today that is all changed. The only situation which modifies that generalization is the increasing efficiency and, consequently, the increasing pace of the educational process. The fact seems inescapable, however, that the complexity and difficulty of social, political, economic, and cultural problems have grown more rapidly than our teaching competence. In view of this acceleration in pace whereby responsibility and power of a social character have outrun even the great increase in the speed of instruction, it is arbitrary to set the cap upon the social, political, aesthetic, and emotional structure at the end of the lower division of the college, and to devote the succeeding years to professional training. In fact the current era seems to argue for prolonging “education” before “training” and for a new, or renewed, insistence upon competence in fields other than professional—or even “intellectual” if that term, as so often, is limited to “knowledge”.

There are many evidences that society is moving in the direction of a shorter working week and a shorter working day. The social, political, economic, and emotional implications of that tendency have been too little considered. Such changes will raise problems of traffic, for example, of entertainment, and of the wise use of leisure time. They will produce social changes yet undreamed, and they will require a political competence greatly in excess of that which has served thus far.

We should not be as fearful of the economic incapacity of really educated people, even without much specific training, as of the economic, social, political, and aesthetic incapacity of the highly trained, inadequately educated group. As many as possible should be both educated and trained, but all the evidence
points to the need for more time, rather than less, to achieve that goal.

In fact the whole situation of the modern world seems to point not to training for a niche, but to renewed and insistent emphasis upon varieties of competence. Only thus may technological unemployment be mastered and we be spared industrial sabotage in the interests of social stability. A depression like this is much more than financial, much more than economic, it is a period of realization that morally, socially, and politically we have not kept pace with production. Man has built institutions so intricate that they tend to be beyond his understanding and outside his control. Our greatest need, therefore, is for coherent personalities, persons with philosophical grasp, intellectual power, emotional drive, and idealistic purposes.

Under such circumstances, certainly, the true college of liberal arts needs no defensive argument. Its values are intrinsic. They are dependent upon nothing that follows the four years themselves. They do not require validation in or by the future. The values inhere in the educational experience itself, and that experience is both the test and the perfect justification of the process.

Liberal education is not alone in this. Beauty is its own justification. Its value is wholly independent of its marketability. Its rights are absolute and depend upon nothing external to itself for endorsement. Truth, in like manner, is its own standard. It is to be measured by nothing outside or beyond itself. Its values are relative only to itself. No other consideration can enter into competition with it. Precisely so, the experience of self realization, of personal integration, opportunity for which it is the function of the liberal arts college specifically to provide, has the same self-sufficient quality. This experience has an entirely self-contained adequacy.

Of course, as I have already said, this experience guarantees so far as any present may guarantee any future, an effective vocational as well as a rich personal life. But if we point our labors consciously toward the future, we vitiate or destroy the experience we seek. Indeed, this experience is based upon the postulate that the future never comes. It is always today; whenever emphasis is shifted to tomorrow there is a distortion that impairs what we aim to achieve. The boy in high school is too often told he is "getting ready" for college. In college he is warned he is "getting ready" for business, or what you will. In his earlier jobs he is "getting ready" for larger responsibilities. Thus he is constantly indoctrinated with the idea that the future is more important than the present. He is told, in effect, that he is in the ante-room of reality. He moves from ante-room to ante-room till hope for "advancement" is gone. Then he lives nostalgically in the past, regretting that he never knew reality while he was in the midst of it.
While, therefore, we may have to meet our critics with in-
sistence that this experience is as good a guarantee of the future
as any other, we must never make that our own objective. For
ourselves, as we strive for the goal, the aim is an experience valid
here and now. Jesus, the Great Teacher, talked very little about
the future. The essence His teaching about the kingdom of God
can be put in very few words. "The kingdom of heaven is within
you." "I am come that they might have life, and that they might
have it more abundantly." The experiences He emphasized were
today's experiences. Tomorrow must wait its turn. It has no
right to levy tribute upon today. "Take no anxious thought for
the morrow" was not a gospel of improvidence. It was a crystal
expression of the fact that you cannot counterfeit the calendar; you
cannot really live tomorrow during today.

From whatever point of view, therefore, this issue is ap-
proached, we can justify the college in concentrating its whole
thought and attention upon the present experience of the student
as a personality.

What, now, are the implications of this point of view for the
structure of the college and for the curriculum? If the college is
seeking to emphasize the unity and the coherence of personality,
if it is shaping its course to induce students to organize and inte-
grate their personalities around high ideals, then it must itself
have a unitary and coherent structure. It must find its own ful-
fillment in effective organization about a central idea, in the co-
herent expression of unity in function and purpose. In so doing,
moreover, it must recognize in its own life the thing which it
continually preaches to the students—that the whole is something
different from the sum of its parts, that there is structure and
significance and power and reality which do not appear in the
component elements, but which may be found only in the totality
itself.

It is a tragic coincidence that colleges with religious affiliations
have fallen victims to the materialism they denounce. They have
become conspicuous exponents of the unsound proposition that the
whole is equal to the sum of its parts. The idea that a college
degree consists of one hundred twenty hours of academic work
plus physical education, plus daily chapel, plus some extra curricu-
lar activities has obscured the necessity for some totality of a
wholly different kind.

The unitary structure has been destroyed even more disastrously
by another mechanistic device. The Methodist Survey spoke to
each of us in authoritative tone about the upper and lower division
or of the junior and the senior college. No one seems to have
paused to ask the question "Who did the dividing and why?" If
that division of the college represents a sound idea, it will certainly
develop. If it develops there is only one logical outcome, namely,
the disappearance of the college entirely. At the University of Chicago, and in most of the places which have junior colleges we may already observe the union of the first two years of what used to be college with the high school. That is getting to be, if not the standard pattern, at least the prevailing conscious pattern. As for the last two years of college, Chicago has attached them to the graduate schools.

If you will examine the curriculum of the typical Methodist institution, you will find that it has approximated this pattern. Thereby it has sold its birthright. The first two years are indubitably connected with secondary education and all too little effort is being made to divorce them therefrom. Moreover, they are needlessly connected, for often they are repetitious. While high school credits are accepted for admission, most colleges proceed from that point to operate upon the presumption that they represent no intellectual reality. As for the last two years of college, they are usually devoted to specialization and vocational training. Their essential denial of anything that has a right to be called the liberal arts is often expressively demonstrated by the number of degrees which are offered. One institution with less than three hundred students grants five degrees. Even where the colleges do not go to such absurd lengths, the major study all too often represents training for some specifically gainful occupation rather than the principal theme in an harmonic development.

When one studies the announced aims of colleges, they fall, for the most part, into two groups. One group admits and justifies by inference this divisive theory. The other ignores it and speaks in terms of a totality which is denied by the actual structure of the curriculum. Always the seamless garment is rent.

I have searched and have sought to find some justification for this schism in the educational scheme of the college. I have never seen an argument, a datum, a statistic, which seems in any way to validate this as a rational, or necessary, or desirable division. Every discussion of the subject, however sane, takes it for granted. If any evidence is produced in support of it, it is patently gathered after the fact to bolster up a policy already determined.

Historically the whole idea appears to be an outgrowth of President Harper's feeling that the secondary school had in its keeping the function of general education but was inadequate to its performance. Therefore, he assigned secondary school two years of the college period to complete the job. Having two years left on his hands, so to speak, he assigned them to the university. Away back in 1905 he was arguing for the sort of division the University of Chicago has now achieved. It was a prophecy of the virtual elimination of four year liberal arts colleges. This prediction of the end of the liberal arts college has been proclaimed
again and again during the last quarter of a century. David Starr
Jordan said that colleges of our type would disappear. In the
earlier years of his administration, in Columbia, Nicholas Murray
Butler was committed to that idea. President Goodnow at Johns
Hopkins attempted to fulfill that same prophecy, and President
Wilbur at Stanford tried to carry out the idea.

All these prophesies unfulfilled may be said to give us com-
fort, because they are evidences that there is more vitality in the
liberal arts college than had been suspected and consequently more
capacity for survival. That seems to me cold comfort. In search-
ing the aims of the colleges, I do not find mere survival conspicu-
ously admitted as the purpose of institutions!

This whole division between the upper and lower of college
seems to be an anachronism. Many of the arguments used for the
last twenty-five years refer to age and to adolescence. These ref-
erences are to a measure of physical development rather than to
intellectual or social maturity. In point of fact age has only a
statistical relationship even to individual physical development.

It is an anachronism in another sense. It is sometimes argued
that the initial two years give opportunity for guidance. This argu-
ment once had some point, because when the division was first
established there were only inadequate instrumentalities for per-
sonal analysis, for measurement of interests and capacities. Course
examinations were the principal available index. Moreover, the
relationship between the high school and the college was so bad
that the college was not inclined to accept anything that the
high school said about the student as valuable. Today that argu-
ment is no longer valid. The articulation of high school and col-
lege while not yet a reality is at least now a possibility, as the
state-wide programs in many states give evidence. We have whole
batteries of tests and many techniques for a more rapid, and on
the whole more reliable, diagnostic analysis of the student’s educa-
tional capacities, interests, and needs than we used to have in the
days when this dualism within the college was established.

No argument for it is based upon modern considerations. Any
reference to age or other general development is based upon sta-
tistical averages or medians. To set up the college on any such
theoretical basis is to run counter to the most significant develop-
ment in all modern education, namely, the recognition of individual
differences.

If the institution is to be designed, as we all say it should
be designed, to minister to individuals in the light of their differ-
ences then any such statistical determination of the structure of
the college course becomes meaningless.

The whole argument which results logically, first, in the schism
of the college and thus in its destruction, rests upon one major
premise—that general education, whatever that may be, is the
function of the high school. With that assumption I take determined issue. It is, indeed, the function of the high school to deal with general education but to insist that general education is essentially secondary is a logical leap which goes clear out of bounds. General education as I conceive it is more than the elementary presentation of data about the modern world. It is the whole process of growing up in the controlled environment of the school. In a world as difficult and complicated as ours the growing up must be not only speeded up, as it has been, but prolonged to maturity.

Indeed, one can go very much further. The prevailing conception of education today (unhappily more honored in words than in practice) is of a continuous and an unending process. General education, forsooth, is to go on until death brings its final dramatic culmination to experience. College—the liberal arts college—is the controlled environment in which schooling makes its final contribution. In the performance of that function the college has behind it not only the weight of history and tradition, it has buildings and grounds and faculties and many other facilities. Before we split it in two and throw it away, there should be something much more persuasive than the abracadabra of a six-three-three plan or a six-four-four plan or some other mechanistic and numerological fantasy set to chin music. I have seen no argument for breaking it up except that the students will learn either too much or too little, but who shall say when the tin cup of general education is full enough and when it has overflowed?

The college has a historic position; it has the force of tradition behind it. If it will assert its function with confidence and pursue it with integrity not merely is its survival insured but the era of its fruitful service to American society is still before it. Structurally we should maintain it as a unit, reject all of the dogmatism which clusters around the words "upper and lower division" and "junior and senior college" and organize the four years as a coherent unfolding experience, constantly enriched.

Of course the abolition of the upper and lower divisions does not mean that there should be no sequential relationships among courses, but even here, much has been done in a mechanical way. The "retention" of material from prerequisite courses is often taken for granted, but seldom tested. What data we have indicate clearly enough that the prerequisites are often formal and quite unreal. On the other hand, the Pennsylvania Study has given clear evidence that not infrequently, persons who have not had "formal" instruction have the substance of introductory work and are ready for more advanced study. The process of inducting the student into the more difficult fields of knowledge such as economics and physics and psychology and philosophy and ethics
should be carried on as rapidly and as broadly as the individual can absorb the material and integrate it into the structure of his life.

The curriculum should be rebuilt upon cornerstones which have been rejected and despised—upon history and theory. There has been a good deal of feeling that colleges lived in the past. It may well be that the teaching of the classics, the modern language requirements, and the courses in history have lacked vitality and obvious functional relationship to current problems. Properly conceived, however, history is nothing other than the experience of the past. Indeed, in a very real sense, science is utterly dependent upon history. No one would attempt to teach science who did not build upon the experience of the past. That experience is not embodied in histories of science, primarily, though it may be found there. It is embodied in the very structure of science itself. When, on the other hand, one considers a political problem, or an economic problem such as bimetallism, the gold standard, inflation, or what you will, experience is not and cannot be integrated in the essential reality of the subject in the way in which it is embodied in science. It is to be found only through a conscious and, one might say labored, study of the past. Thus the perspective which may be said to be almost inherent in science, which grows by accretion, cumulatively, and whose evolution is manifest within its structure is not so evident in social, economic, political and cultural life, whose growth is not by any means cumulative, but often cyclical, and whose lessons, therefore, are often buried, as are the lessons of earlier inflations in American currency.

There must be, therefore, a group of institutions which, while, not in any sense unmindful of the present; are, nonetheless, mindful that the problems of the present have their roots in the past, and need the experiences of the past to point the way to current solutions. If perspective is the great essential, then nothing can be more practical, nothing can be of more immediate significance than the historical approach which has been, traditionally, the approach of the liberal arts college.

The other of these two essentials to perspective, I have called "theory". By that I mean a body of principles which lie buried beneath the debris of techniques. One may know any number of techniques of salesmanship and advertising and the like, but back of them lie psychological and economic principles. Those principles partake of the nature of scientific generalizations, of the character of philosophical interpretations, and of logical explanations. They are valid within the limits of experience and statistics, but they are not obvious in most current situations.

They are like the foundations and the steel skeleton of a modern skyscraper, completely concealed by a veneer of brick or stone. The brick or stone furnishes the appearance—the surface manifestation—but the reality and the significant structural element is
the steel and concrete which do not appear at all. The building would stand without the stone veneer. Indeed, it is the opinion of one of the greatest modern architects that veneer is irrelevant and dishonest, and that the building would function better if its structural reality were disclosed and the walls and partitions were designed with modern materials. In much the same way the techniques, the surface phenomena, the obvious facts of economic, social, political, and cultural life, are dependent upon and yet tend to conceal, the principles which are, in any true definition of the situation, the ultimate reality. It is to such principles that the liberal arts college is traditionally dedicated, and the fact that they have no immediacy and no obvious utility does not alter the importance of teaching these elements.

Finally, I come to the method of achieving this unity. It cannot be, as once it was, through a uniform curriculum; it must come only by an insistence upon the individual which is almost clinical in character. Our first effort should be to know the student. That is a truism, but like so many other truisms has been neglected and forgotten. We have had Freshman Week for ten years or more. The period has been devoted, for the most part, to telling the freshman about the college, to "adjusting" him to his new environment. Many years ago Jesus upset the Scribes and the Pharisees by remarking, almost casually, that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It ought not to take any new prophet to suggest that colleges are made for students and not students for the colleges, that we ought not, therefore, to lay so much emphasis upon the adjustment of the freshman to his new environment as upon the adjustment of the environment to the new freshman.

We have listened, these many years, to lamentations about the inadequate preparation of the freshman. But if we have an adequate sense of humor, we will remind ourselves that the disparity in preparation is no greater at the end of high school than the disparity in "completion" at the end of college. Every co-operative test which has involved any number of students has made that point monumentally clear.

Naturally, if we insist upon such a mechanistic conception as a unit of high school credit, we cannot expect those to be uniform in content either intellectually, emotionally, or in any other significant way. There are school differences and there are individual differences which these awkward measuring devices simply conceal.

Freshman Week, therefore, ought to be turned around and be devoted to a kind of inventory of the freshman’s baggage. What does he bring with him—in ideals, in attitudes, in skills, in capacities, in knowledge? This testing program is not designed for entrance but for guidance, guidance not so much to the freshman as guidance to the college, how to deal with him, how to adjust
itself to his need, rather than how to classify him into some niche like a plaster saint in our collegiate Gothic. We should find out where his foundations are strongest. When we build a building, even if it be upon a level plot, we make borings. In this exploratory fashion we discover that conditions are often very different in different spots within a relatively small area. Occasionally one finds quicksand right in the midst of hard clay. We would think it foolish, merely because there is an acre of ground, to put a building upon it without care in testing foundation soil. Likewise during Freshman Week we should make borings and discover what is the best location for our educational structure, what form it may most conveniently take, and what foundations are already secure and worthwhile.

These tests should be supplemented with a program of counselling. Again, if I may turn our ideas topsy-turvy for a moment, we should not give so much counsel to the freshman but, without admitting it, and so spoiling him, get his counsel. In other words, listen to him, what his ideas are, his hopes, his dreams, and his aspirations. This becomes the foundation for an individual curriculum. Where his foundations are strong we should not require him to engage in the deadly repetition of putting new foundations on top of old, which add little or nothing to the strength of the substructure but add infinitely to the drudgery of college life. Where the foundations are weak, we must, of course, make fresh beginnings, but why should a student of relative maturity of mind, of excellent intellectual power, take only work which bears the label 'freshman'? Why not take some work which bears the sophomore label—and the junior label for that matter—despite the fact that the Methodist Survey looked with suspicious eyes upon students taking courses out of their 'proper' classification? Why, if our ideal is individual development and the enrichment of personality, must a man walk in lockstep through an ironclad curriculum of survey courses and then of specialized information?

As the student progresses, more and more emphasis must be placed upon knitting together the strands of earlier intellectual experience. More and more the coherent quality of all the diverse intellectual, ethical, emotional, and physical experiences should be coordinated into harmonious and effective relationship within the personality. In the classic outline of the modern curriculum, it was proposed to achieve this objective through the 'major' which was defined as a specific field wherein the student should gain a special competence. This was often the theme of President A. Lawrence Lowell.

The purpose was to have some field of thought, toward which one was drawn by interest or aptitude, serve as a focal point with reference to which all the disparate knowledges and disciplines fell into perspective. In the age of externalism and materialism through which we have been passing that intelligible and
coherent ideal has been almost totally lost to sight. We seized
upon the word "specialized" and gave it a vocational flavor. We
took the word "competence" and gave it a materialistic, a finan-
cial emphasis. Thus the major came to be the expression of a
way of making a living instead of an opportunity to establish a
way of life.

Except within very narrow fields the liberal arts college failed
successfully to compete in that materialistic aim. If he has taken
all the courses offered in the field by a liberal arts college, the
graduate is not a chemist, for example. I am not denying that
many graduates from liberal arts college have, without other form-
al training, become first-class chemists. They have done so
through their continuing education in life and experience. It is
because they acquired the habit of learning and mastered the prob-
lem of intellectual self-discipline. That brings us back to the
point of departure—our defense against materialists who are for-
ever saying that the ideal of liberal arts college which I am ex-
ounding would be all right if the graduate did not have to make
a living. My precise point is that if we have the courage and the
insight to proclaim this gospel of the liberal arts, the converts
whom we win will have not only the good life of the mind and the
spirit, they will be effective workers in the material world. In
a world of change they will not be fixed but will change with it.
Because they have met and mastered the great question, "what
is life for?" they are ready to meet its vicissitudes not only with
philosophy and poise but effectiveness and intelligent direction.

The major, therefore, should not be training in the practice of
an art, but discipline in an intellectual field. It is not the acquisi-
tion of skills for application to a specific vocation, but the matura-
tion of a point of view, a habit of independent work, a poise, and
a balance which mark a coherent personality.

We are the inheritors of a great tradition. It is a tradition
steadily enriched by the growth of human knowledge, by the op-
portunities which have come for expansion and development in the
activities of the college. It has been impoverished only when we
have been blind to our opportunities, false to our faith, recreant to
our duty. We have been like Naaman, who having had the ex-
perience of a great religious awakening whereby he came to know
the true God, said that considering the environment to which he
was to return he should be pardoned if he made his obeisance to
the false god in deference to that environment. Thus all the reality
and all the significance and all the enrichment were drained from
his experience. He abandoned principle in the name of accommo-
dation. So we also have asked pardon as we turned from what
we knew was the path of righteousness, to compromise with en-
vironment. It is our distinctive function to create an environment,
not represent an ideal, and to achieve a purpose wholly immaterial.
This is our reasonable service.