

# Curmudgeon College

## Catalog Preface

By John Fischer

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### **Our Philosophy**

No student should be compelled to attend a college he doesn't like. So if you disapprove of something here, don't bother to demonstrate. Just leave.

### **Our Policy**

Absolute freedom, tempered with occasional expulsions.

### **Dormitory Rules**

We don't have any. As a matter of fact, we have no dormitories. Our founder and president, Henry J. Curmudgeon, can't see why an educational institution should be distracted by running a hotel business on

the side. Consequently our students live anywhere they like—motels, boarding houses, brothels, or communes. How they behave there is a matter that concerns only them, their landlords, their parents, and the local police.

### **Sports**

For the same reason, we have no sports program. Why should a college mess around with show biz when Joe Namath can do it better? Any undergraduate who feels in need of exercise can apply to the maintenance department for a broom, or can go to Jocko Sullivan's Gymnasium and Pugilistic Parlor, conveniently located near our downtown campus. Obsessive exhibitionists are free to hire their own basketball court or football field.

### **Sit-Ins**

All students are welcome to sit in any classroom as long as they like, for the standard lecture fee of one dollar an hour, payable at the door. Any attempt to sit in the administration building will be treated as

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criminal trespass by our town sheriff, Knucks McGrory (6'3", 280 lbs.). Undergraduates, in fact, have no occasion to enter the administration building, or even to go near it except on the first day of each term, when enrollment fees are payable at the drive-in cashier's window. No checks accepted. It is pointless to try to intimidate President Curmudgeon. He does not engage in confrontations; they bore him.

### Governance

The college is governed by President Curmudgeon, period. He hires and fires the faculty, fixes salaries, sets the curriculum, and makes final decisions on the admission and expulsion of students. As in all colleges, the president is held responsible—by the public, alumni, professors, and undergraduates—for everything that happens. Obviously he cannot discharge this responsibility without commensurate authority.

He may from time to time consult members of the faculty on administrative matters, but feels no obligation to take their views seriously. Early in his career President Curmudgeon learned that the typical professor can't administer his way out of a paper bag. As he observed in his now-famous paper or collegiate governance:

"The true scholar is inherently incapable of running anything. By temperament, he loathes the very concept of authority; hence he is always opposed to the administration, but is even more opposed to the idea of exercising authority himself. When confronted with the necessity of making a decision, he habitually falls into a spasm of self-doubt, takes refuge in a faculty committee which argues for three months, and then resolves to defer action until further information becomes available. He can never learn Rule No. 1 of management: 'A good executive is one who always acts promptly and is sometimes right.'

"Consequently our faculty is limited to its proper functions: teaching and research, in that order. Managerial decisions are handled by the responsible executive, i.e. me. Students participate in governance the same way that customers participate in the governance of Macy's. If they don't like the goods offered, they can go to Gimbel's."

### Pot, LSD, and Liquor

What a student ingests on his own time and in his own quarters is his own affair. But if he snores in class, breaks laboratory equipment, gets busted by the police on campus, freaks out in the halls, or otherwise disturbs his teachers and fellow students, he gets shipped out on the next plane.

### Tenure

None. Each faculty member signs an undated resignation the day he is hired, and henceforth serves at the pleasure of the president.

In the early days of the college it was widely believed that this somewhat unorthodox arrangement might make it difficult to attract first-class professors.

This proved untrue. In the sellers' market which has long prevailed in academia, a talented man needs no job protection because he can always take his pick of a dozen chairs; tenure, therefore, merely shelters the incompetent.

Nevertheless, to make sure that it gets the best men available, Curmudgeon has from the beginning paid salaries twice as high as the normal scale. In addition it offers certain unique fringe benefits. Professors never have to waste their time in committee meetings or the deliberations of an Academic Senate. They also are freed from the demeaning obligation of cranking out so-called "scholarly works" in order to demonstrate their "productivity." On the contrary, they are discouraged from writing anything for subsidized publication: that is, by a scholarly journal or university press. When a professor has something really worth putting into type, any number of commercial publishers will be delighted to get their hands on it. To be sure, this means that our faculty have to learn to write English, a rare skill among people who have marinated in academic jargon—but it pays off in hard cash, as John Kenneth Galbraith, Loren Eiseley, Samuel Eliot Morison, John Maynard Keynes, and other distinguished scholars have clearly demonstrated.\*

The most attractive fringe benefit, however, is our Professorial Piece-of-the-Action Plan. Instead of enrolling for formal courses, our students simply attend any lectures or seminars which they consider rewarding—basing their choices on the catalogue descriptions, the "Student Appraisal of Faculty" published each term, and the campus grapevine. Such choices are not made lightly, since undergraduates have to drop a dollar into the toll box every time they enter a classroom.† The resulting cash flow indicates accurately

\*Curmudgeon is glad to see that its reversal of the publish-or-perish rule is rapidly being adopted by the traditional educational institutions. This revolutionary change was, of course, hastened by the recent upsurge of interest in the protection of our environment. Roughly half a million faculty members are now employed in the United States, and each of them is expected to publish at least one scholarly book every decade, if he hopes to impress the tenure committee or earn a promotion. This would mean an output of 50,000 books a year—patently an unrealistic figure, since the country's entire publishing industry is geared to produce only about 25,000 titles annually, including unscholarly works by the likes of Mailer, Roth, and Susann. Moreover, when the public began to realize how this academic make-work affects the environment—the devastation of forest for wood pulp, the pollution of air and water by unnecessary paper mills, the clogging of libraries and incinerators with unread (and mostly unreadable) volumes—it demanded an end to such damned foolishness. Eventually even the Ivy League had to concede that a teacher need publish only when he actually had something to say.

†A variant of this arrangement apparently worked quite well at the Universities of Bologna and Paris during the Middle Ages. As the professors walked down the aisle after a lecture, his auditors each dropped a coin in the tail of his academic hood. This pocket still survives, but garners few coins nowadays.

which teachers are meeting the felt needs of the students. Consequently, it is only fair to reward those who consistently produce above-average gate receipts with a percentage of the take. Our star performers, as a result, are the only faculty members in America who earn more than football coaches.

On the other hand, any professor who cannot attract enough paying customers to cover his own salary, plus a share of the overhead, is encouraged to take up some other calling.

Since students are incapable of judging academic quality—how can they tell whether old Dr. Chips is really giving them the latest dope in his field?—some teachers feared that the cash-flow system might reward the merely entertaining lecturers at the expense of the more profound and demanding scholars. To avoid this, all classrooms are monitored with television cameras, connected by closed circuit to our Inspector General's office. There the inspectors, each a recognized authority in his discipline, periodically evaluate each professor's classroom performance, to make sure that he comes up to scratch both in substance and in pedagogical technique. Thus our teachers are the first in academic history to be held strictly accountable for the quality of their work, just like professionals in other fields. Yet at the same time we observe the time-honored convention that no administrator or academic superior can ever enter a classroom without an invitation from the teacher.

### Admission Policy

Elitist. No student is admitted unless he demonstrates his ability to write a page of coherent, correctly spelled English prose, and to do basic arithmetic; this rule automatically eliminates about 75 per cent of all high-school graduates. Moreover, this college is designed only for those undergraduates who already know what they want to do with their lives, and want our help in preparing themselves for it. Youngsters who prefer to put in four years of intellectual finger-painting while they "find themselves" can go elsewhere; we offer no courses in social psychology, literature appreciation, oriental philosophy, or art history.

Curmudgeon, furthermore, does not accommodate draft dodgers or students who merely want the prestige of a diploma. Since we are not accredited, our undergraduates are not sheltered from the draft; and we award no diplomas. Instead, a student may, if he wishes, ask his professors for a Certificate of Competence in his chosen field—engineering, ecology, journalism, teaching, or whatever. He may request such a certificate whenever he thinks he is ready for it, and can persuade his teachers to sign it; in some cases this may require two years of work, in others seven, depending on the student's ability and the difficulty of the subject. A Certificate of Competence, we have found, is of considerable interest to future employers, but it confers no social prestige.

### Examinations and Grades

If a student feels that an examination will help

him measure his progress in any given subject, he may ask his teacher to give him one at any time. Similarly, if a teacher is in doubt about a student's progress, he may call for a written or oral examination. Otherwise no exams are required.

Neither are grades. If an undergraduate is goofing off, his teachers soon know it; and when any three of them decide that he is wasting their time, and his own, he is expelled forthwith. This seldom happens. Since our regular fees plus the pay-at-the-classroom-door system make Curmudgeon an expensive institution, which offers nothing but a chance for education, it usually attracts only those youngsters who are eager and able to do the work.

### Financial Aid

Available on request to all students, on a lifetime reimbursable basis.

We cheerfully advance whatever money an undergraduate may need to cover his fees, living expenses, and door tolls. In return, he promises to pay us one per cent of his annual income for the rest of his life, beginning one year after graduation. He also signs a form authorizing the Internal Revenue Service to collect this money on behalf of the college, by the simple method of adding one per cent to his yearly income tax.

This arrangement has proved highly satisfactory both to students and to the college. Any bright youngster, no matter how poor, can get an education without financial strain. Moreover, the one per cent reimbursement is the best investment he can ever make, since a practical, professional-oriented training of the kind we offer normally multiplies his lifetime earning capacity by at least ten.

For the college, this system produces a dependable—and steadily rising—flow of revenue. The president is thus relieved of the humiliating and onerous chore of constantly begging for money, a duty which consumes up to 50 per cent of the time of most college presidents. He can therefore devote his full attention to running the place, to the obvious benefit of both students and faculty.

The Curmudgeon One Per Cent Plan also has a Robin Hood side effect. Those of our graduates who become millionaires—a gratifying percentage—automatically pay high for the training which was so markedly responsible for their success. Hence they subsidize other graduates who never make much money, or who deliberately choose the less lucrative professions, such as poetry or politics, and therefore can never repay the full cost of their education.

### Faculty

Curmudgeon is proud of the fact that it employs a smaller percentage of Doctors of Philosophy than any other college in the country.

This does not mean that we do not value advanced degrees, in their proper place. A teacher of ecology, for example, not only needs a Ph.D. in biology, but also some postgraduate study in several other disci-

plines, including economics, climatology, and urban studies. A doctorate also can be a useful tool in teaching the physical sciences and certain other subjects, such as economics and history.

In many fields, however, it not only is unnecessary; it may be a positive handicap. Witness those hapless wretches who earn Ph.D.s in English Literature. Their ordeal, coupled with years of exposure to the Publications of the Modern Language Association, frequently cripples their prose style for life, so that they are unfitted for anything except teaching another generation of Lit. students and writing criticism for nonpaying journals. Curmudgeon has no place for these self-maimed scholars. We do, of course, encourage our students to read and enjoy literature, but not in class; it is properly a leisure-time activity, like listening to music, making amateur films, and chasing girls.

Our only English courses are designed for undergraduates who hope to become professional writers. They are taught by men who have made their living in the grade for at least ten years; none ever had time to get a Ph.D. because they were too busy writing novels, biographies, and magazine articles.

Most of our other departments also are staffed with Old Pros. Political science is taught by retired mayors, governors, and senators; public administration by high-ranking civil servants; business administration by seasoned executives who once managed their own firms with indisputable success.

We also feel free to ignore the traditional departmental boundaries, which often are as anachronistic as feudal baronies—and as stoutly defended by the faculty who man them. We are now in the process, for instance, of merging our political-science and economics courses into a single Department of Political Economy, on the grounds that economics is what politics is all about: "Who gets what, how, and, from whom."

The new department also will include all courses on city and regional planning. This subject has fallen into disrepute on most campuses because it traditionally has been an adjunct of the School of Art and Architecture. Its graduates were trained to draw lovely maps and sketch monumental building projects, which almost invariably came to nothing because they had no relation to a city's economic and political realities. Thus the filing cabinets of bureaucracy from coast to coast are filled with plans that never had a chance, forgotten by everybody except the heartbroken aesthetes who drafted them.

The few plans that actually have been carried through with some success were conceived and put into operation by men of a different breed. They are money men, with their hands on a spigot which controls the flow of public funds. Often they are budget officers, with desks next door to the mayor or governor whom they serve. Sometimes they are bureaucrats who direct the hoses carrying federal money to local communities—as in the case of the Appalachian Regional Commission, which probably has produced more effective planning than any other agency in America. For the heart of any plan lies in capital investment: in the decisions which fix priorities, and also release money to build a highway here, a housing project there, a sewage-treatment plant somewhere else. Basically, such decisions are both political and economic, and the men who make them will not long survive unless they are skilled in political economy. They should, of course, be advised by architects—and by economists, engineers, and a lot of other specialists—but they themselves are specialists only in the public business. For the Acropolis we have to thank Pericles, a politician. Who now remembers the names of the architects he hired?

If this college can produce even a small-size Pericles now and then, we shall regard this experiment as a success.

