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## Problems in General Education

Those who know education best have sometimes felt it to be headed in the wrong direction. One late, great O. U. professor agreed, and here is his Why.

THOSE WHO can remember with a sense of correct evaluation the events since the beginning of the present century realize that the past 50 years constitute a period of invention and perfection of those inventions which has changed the world. Hundreds of new words and terms appear in print and are heard on the street and on the farm.

We have been engaged, and are still engaged, in a revolution of society as important, if not more important, than the combined industrial, intellectual and political revolutions of the last half of the 18th and the first quarter of the 19th centuries. Our higher educational system prior to 1914 did not undergo many fundamental changes, but since that time there has been expansion in every direction—both vertical and horizontal—and without sufficient direction.

Had engineers known in 1920 that highways would be used today for automobiles that travel comfortably at 60 or more miles

an hour and by trucks with the capacity of freight cars, they would have constructed better highways. Even more parking space would have been provided in cities. A half-century ago the Wright brothers built an airplane that flew. Today we have jet-propelled planes. Our planes today leave New York at 6 p. m., New York time, and arrive in Los Angeles at 6:30 p. m., Los Angeles time. The first airports would have been built differently had such air speed been anticipated.

Millions of dollars' worth of natural gas would not have been wasted in the early years of this century had our engineers known its value and probable use. Social legislation would not have been so delayed if legislators and others had known in 1920 something about the need of social security.

It is no wonder then that men and women, mostly men, concerned with the problem of creating facilities for higher education, failed to see what would be needed today. With exuberance and en-

thusiasm, departments, divisions, schools and colleges were expanded and multiplied. This condition prevailed for several reasons. Higher education was expected to meet the needs of society but not many seemed to know what those needs were. Today evaluation of our educational procedures is under serious consideration with the hope that the next few decades may not be barren of good results.

The current evaluation of higher education has come before teachers, directors, deans and other administrators. General education is now looked upon as one, and only one, method of preparing students for living today and in the future. The current and lively discussions on general education now before the public are evidence of a demand that something positive be done. . . .

If our American society, in short if our democratic heritage, is to mean anything for the remainder of the century, to say nothing about the next century, there is the absolute need of a revision of our educa-

tional system. It is unnecessary to argue that our democracy is a complex institution and needs not only a comprehensively trained citizenship but also a citizenship deeply appreciative of its responsibilities. It is felt that programs of general education will equip the operating personnel of our democratic state with adequate tools to defend and preserve it. A major problem, probably the major, is how can we continue both specialization and general education.

Can the personnel in specialization be made conscious of the needs of our country and thus support the personnel that works full time and intelligently at the job of preserving our democratic society? Is that the way it should be done, or is that the way it can be done? Would such a procedure of training and operation be democratic? These are a few of the questions confronting educators who are conscious of our dilemma.

The trained personnel in our armed forces guide and shape our destiny with the aid of millions of men and women called to service in emergencies. Could there not be a product from institutions of higher learning capable of directing society through legislation and its proper execution? This would not be conducive to class society any more than our armed forces constitute a class society. It would involve participation on the part of everyone—a group larger than the active participants at the present time. This might be a leadership group.

Democratic leadership in American society is not well enough understood. Is general education an agency by which such leadership could be produced even if such group leadership is desirable? The answer seems definitely to be in the affirmative. Certainly there must be other methods of achieving the goals, but they do not seem to be at hand. . . .

**B**ROADLY SPEAKING, education is divided into general and special education. The differences and relationship of the two must be understood. In preparation for the presentation of the case for general education the *Harvard Report* stated:

"The term, general education, is somewhat vague and colorless; it does not mean some airy education in knowledge in general (if there be such knowledge), nor does it mean education for all in the sense of universal education. It is used to indicate that part of a student's whole education which looks first of all to his life as a responsible human being and citizen; while the term, special education, indicates that part which looks to the student's competence in some occupation. . . ."

Always, of course, "education looks both to the nature of knowledge and to the good of man in society." With respect to the latter phrase, special emphasis is given to the traits and characteristics of mind developed by general education. . . .

There must be good teaching that will enable a student to analyze what he reads. . . . A common core of knowledge must be set up. There is need of what is called "community of values, ideas and attitudes." This will not destroy individualism which must ever be kept as the basic principle of our democratic ideals. It will only serve to strengthen our unity, that quality so much desired in our present age, which in turn will preserve liberty and its product—democracy.

General education aims to produce knowledge and understanding which in turn affords "a more abundant personal life and a stronger, freer social order." Upon this a specialized training may safely be based. Our physical scientists are amply aware of this need. Liberal education is a part of the agency by which this better social order may be acquired, but it is not enough. . . .

The purposes of general education are to equip the individual with ability to perform and behave as becomes a good democratic citizen. Eleven specific attainments are stated as equipment for democratic living. They cover such activities as personal conduct, participation in local, state and national affairs, world understanding, human welfare, expression of ideas, emotional and social adjustment, health, fine arts, family life, vocations and constructive thinking. Any educational program that affords such fitness for living can be administered only with great wisdom. The high goal should not discourage educators. Rather it should be an inspiration. It does seem imperative.

These are American views. Education demands the free flow of ideas. There is reason for our knowing more about educational concepts among the allied democracies. Isolationism in education might become as fatal as it proved to be in the political world prior to World War II. . . .

Max Beloff, member of the staff of Oxford University, says that the university must overcome ignorance and prejudice and create an educated, informed electorate. Of course, the American university has aims different from those in England and on the continent, but Mr. Beloff makes a valid criticism of our universities when he says the American student postpones, because of our curricula and procedure, the training that will enable him to do things for himself. He must meet the demand

made upon him after he leaves the university with his own application of information necessary for good citizenship. Self-reliance and ingenuity, with his university training, are his tools of operation.

Too much is left to the university graduate. He needs more specific instruction that will enable him to compete without the trial and error methods and without handicaps that may invite failure. In short, from the British education viewpoint he needs what in America is called general education. It is obvious that so long as we emphasize specialization without a solid background of social sciences and humanities the graduate must rely upon his own native ability, resourcefulness and good luck.

Probably the Jeffersonian idea of education, not wholly unlike that of the British and continental universities, has merit. We have definitely inclined to the Jacksonian theory—universal education for everyone through the primary, secondary and college grades. If we can provide more self-criticism and ultimately secure results, we are definitely on the road of further progress. The problem in this instance is to convince not only administrators in the field of higher education but also the classroom teachers. Traditions in education carry much weight, probably too much.

General education concerns itself with democracy. . . . There are at least two characteristic facets of democracy—"one, its creativity, sprung from the self-trust of its members; the other, its exposure to discord and even to fundamental divergence of standards precisely because of this creativity, the source of its strength" (from "General Education in a Free Society," *Harvard Report*). This comprehensive statement, in short a definition, explains why democracy is an institution and as such it is subject to varied interpretations and explanations. Whatever American democracy may be, it must be understood to be defended, and it must be defended.

American democracy is complex. No one needs to feel that he must know everything about it in order to appreciate its blessings and obligations. There will be a safer America, however, if a greater number of its citizens understand more of its democracy. This safer America will be realized, in part at least, when every intelligent citizen participates in a functioning democracy to his fullest capacity.

This participation need not be a constant activity in which one engages like members of a football team playing in a post-season game, but it can be an activity in which one displays training and appreciation of the importance of the occa-

sion. Such training and appreciation on the part of democratic citizens come from the proper education in which they have participated.

GENERAL EDUCATION "should strive to enrich society by freeing the people's native gifts." The areas of man's life, both as an individual and a member of society, are the physical world about him, his own corporate life and his inner visions and standards. . . .

Some of the advocates of general education feel that an efficient program can be had only when the graduating high school senior has an appreciation of it. Shall one say then that both elementary and secondary teachers must be prepared to teach general education? If this is not done, the college freshman will have to adjust himself to a new approach to his courses. Too many freshmen today are eager to begin specialization and consequently have to be convinced that there is plenty of time for intensive study in the upper division.

Probably adequate counseling and guidance would be one way of solving the student problem, but counseling and guidance also require sensible, reasonable and sympathetic staff members.

The freshman in college frequently comes from a secondary school where little attention has been given the world in which he lives or any preview of the world in which he will live. In this case the approach to general education in the college curricula will present a problem. If general education has been a field in the secondary schools, the college task is not so difficult. . . . The student must come to college with a mind capable of grasping, holding and developing useful information. This quality—a prerequisite—should be developed in the elementary and secondary schools.

First, then, these schools must provide better guidance for good citizenship. . . . This can be done by making it possible for teachers to remain longer with pupils—more than one year. Better pupil records can be set up since the teacher can study pupil relationships. Instruction can be adapted to the pupils' levels and capacities.

Second, the teaching of democracy must be a planned program. This involves the teacher and a library. A few books, but very few, have been written that explain democracy other than in abstract terms. It is often discussed as a way of life which is sufficient if one really understands what is meant by the American way of life. After setting up certain criteria, such as respect for one's associates and their ideas, the teacher can direct participation in pupil ac-

tivities. The free flow of ideas—a term now widely used with reference to international affairs—can be directed. Time, of course, is required for this. The wise principal and teacher can arrange that.

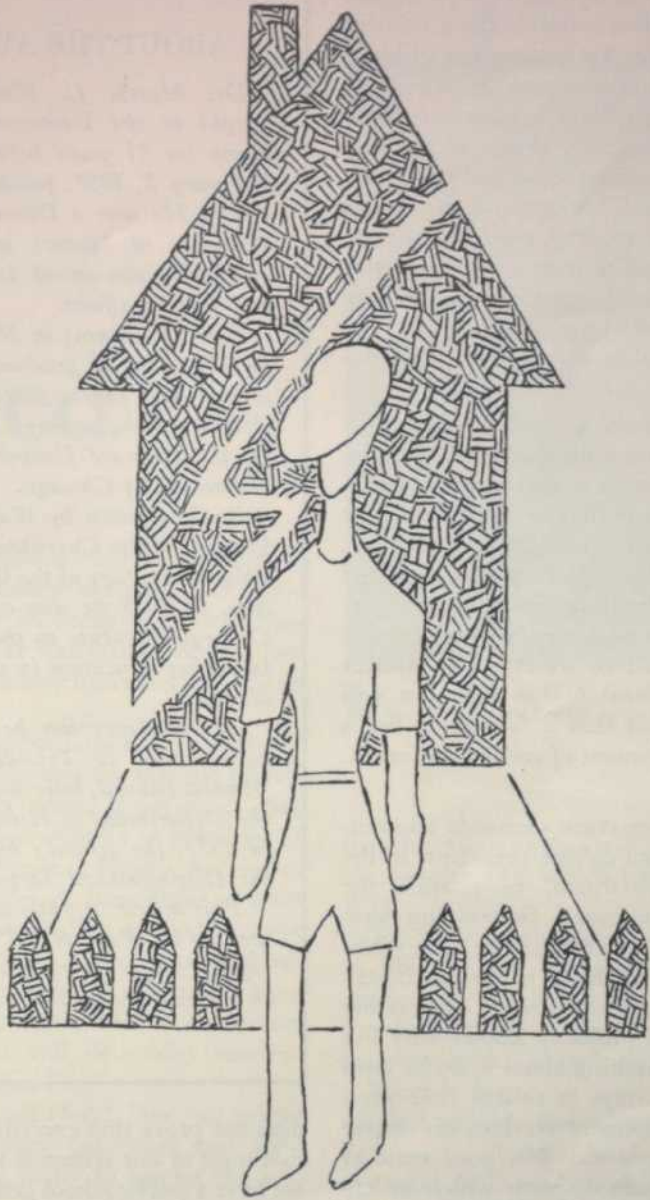
To be sure, not every pupil will equally discuss or participate. It is not to be expected. Adults do not engage in discussion of and participation in activities with equal ease and background. Children too have handicaps arising from their home life, environment and lack of native ability. But all can participate to the extent which opportunities afford.

Much more may be said about developing better citizenship in the elementary and secondary schools. Parents and teachers may come to understandings which certainly does not mean coming to mutual

agreement. Parents, teachers and pupils can engage in community projects. Certainly during the war years the sale and purchase of war-saving stamps and bonds was a total program in which all three groups participated with ease and effectiveness. This was an emergency. There is an emergency now. Democracy must go forward. This is not a trite phrase but a fact which needs no detailed exposition.

If proper attitudes are developed in the elementary and secondary school, the high school graduate will come to college with an appreciation of further training in good citizenship. The college, both its administration and teaching staff, should continue the training program in citizenship. Whether or not it does is too apparent.

It is obvious that administering a pro-



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gram of general education for college students is easier than administering one for secondary schools. Yet institutions of higher learning have no easy task. A large body of students, particularly in state-supported institutions, where little choice of students is made, will present a social and economic, as well as cultural, background that varies from very poor to very good. So the instructor will need to have a generous attitude, patience and versatility in leading students to see the larger, more important, and fundamental aspects of a general education.

It is not expected that all students will share equally and with the same appreciation the presentation of views on what constitutes a vigorous development of society in accordance with our traditional goals, the essentials of good citizenship, and the training and educating processes of all varieties of talents necessary to carry on our highly industrialized society. The student personnel problem in the classroom will call for ingenuity that is frequently not a part of the equipment of college professors.

GENERAL EDUCATION demands administrators, from college presidents to the departmental chairman, to provide the proper and continued functioning programs of good citizenship. The alert freshman knows when he is receiving citizenship training in the classroom. If it is not found there, he probably knows why but he cannot do anything about it. So he joins the crowd that stays in college four years and at commencement receives his degree just like his classmates. His good sense of democratic citizenship with which he entered as a freshman has been suppressed and, therefore, undeveloped. The college has another alumnus to add to its multiplying thousands. Or he may have had enough initiative to develop on his own. In that case he becomes, as a graduate, a potential future citizen who will soon find his way to the top, but he knows how he reached it. The college missed an opportunity to make him a valuable and able supporter of its program.

Each year articles appear in widely read magazines showing the failure of our educational system. . . . Not all purchasers of any one of these magazines read the articles, but most of them doubtless see the glaring headlines and, if they are like the average American, say: "It's about time something like this is written."

In addition to the articles on the failure of education appearing in the popular magazines, there are plenty in the educational magazines and journals. This fact, the writing on the failure of education,

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Dr. Morris L. Wardell, '19ba, taught at the University of Oklahoma for 31 years before his death February 5, 1957, following a heart attack. He was a David Ross Boyd Professor of History and a distinguished historian of state, national and Indian affairs.*

*Born in Illinois in 1890, he came to Oklahoma to graduate from high school and junior college at Alva. Afterwards he received degrees from O. U., Harvard University and the University of Chicago.*

*Books written by Wardell include History of the Cherokee Nation and Political History of the Cherokee Nation. In 1939 he was chosen by the Carnegie Institute to study problems in higher education in the U. S. and abroad.*

*At the University he early served as assistant to President William Bennett Bizzell, later became head of the Department of History. He won, in 1953, the school's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Citation.*

*This article, slightly abridged, was written by Wardell in 1949. The passage of eight years has only served to increase its timeliness.*

does not prove that everything is wrong or that most of our system is wrong, but since we have a public school system it does seem necessary that something should be done to give the public information on the study and revision of curricula that is pursued by educators. Furthermore something should be done to correct our procedures when they are wrong or lacking in the scope of learning.

The general criticisms are that our young people, in secondary as well as in higher education, are not amply trained in citizenship, and are not given information concerning the vocations and professions that are not open to them, and that in too many instances poor teachers and inadequate facilities kill the incentive to further study. It is not difficult to see that if more emphasis were placed upon general education some of this criticism would be lessened. The problem here is that of finding teachers or equipping those preparing to teach, which would be better, who can present subject matter in a way that will give the needed emphasis to general education.

It is not enough to say a general educa-

tion will be secured by the students if the teacher knows his or her business and responsibility. There must be more than a good teacher; there must be courses with good content. A solution might be proposed: These colleges and universities not yet working on revision or reconversion and inauguration of new courses should do so—and with a purpose. Mere change is not progress. Considerable thought should be given the personnel of committees that will study the needs of curricula. Diagnosis and prescription will not cure the ills of a patient. Following directions and instructions will be necessary.

Many colleges and universities have already introduced programs of general education. The few mentioned below are selected because of their geographic locations and their enrollments.

Individual guidance as one means of general education is employed at Sarah Lawrence College. The first year or two of the student's program is given over to exploratory courses to determine fields of interest. . . . Here the enrolment is small, about 350, but if the program is good enough for a month's study by 100 professors from 67 colleges, including Yale, Colgate, N. Y. U. and M. I. T., it must have merit.

Good teachers and good procedures are necessary to promote and execute the general education program at Sarah Lawrence. Dr. Edwin Embree, director of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, who has studied students in many American colleges, said: "So far as my knowledge goes, better general education is going on at Sarah Lawrence than at any place in the world today." The president, Harold Taylor, is a product of general education. . . .

America's social structure is not a horizontal plane. There are depressions and elevations and they are sometimes separated by rather precipitous markings. Our social structure as represented in the college classroom may possibly be an undulating plane, but the extremes are there. The presentation of a program of general education must be in accordance with social facts that do exist on the part of students.

Chancellor Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago in a convocation address said, "Civilization is doomed unless the hearts and minds of men can be changed, unless we can bring about a moral, intellectual and spiritual reformation . . . throughout the world. . . . If we want world peace, a world community and a world state that will last, therefore, we must promote a moral, intellectual and

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the *Wichita Falls* (Texas) *Record News* and is a member of that newspaper's editorial staff. Miss Ryle, who graduated from O. U. in August, is the daughter of Judge John W. Ryle, '35Law, and Mrs. Ryle, Norman. She is the sister of Mary Frances Ryle Gittenger, '39h.ec; John Kenneth Ryle, '50ed, and Thomas W. Ryle, '52ba.

Betty Ruth Estes, '57bs, Altus, and Karlyn Del Miller, '57ba, Enid, both have won Fulbright scholarships for the coming school year and will study in Europe. Miss Estes will report to Bad Honnef, Germany, for orientation on September 20, then proceeds to the University of Kiel where she will study mathematics. Miss Miller arrives in La Havre, France, September 23 and will study French literature at the University of Lyons.

Daniel P. Jones, Jr., '57bus, Oklahoma City, was commissioned a Navy ensign July 12 upon completion of 16 weeks pre-flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. He now is undergoing primary flight training at Saufley Field, Pensacola.

Jerald D. Gass, '57chem, Oklahoma City, and Richard Storm, '57bs, Shawnee, both sailed September 10 on the liner Berlin for Europe, where they will study under Fulbright scholarships during 1957-58. Gass will take up chemistry at the University of Turbingen in Germany, then return to Harvard University in 1958 where he will work on his Ph.D. degree while serving an assistantship. Storm will study physics at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.

Marvin C. Boyd, Perry; Wendell B. Harris, Oklahoma City; Carroll G. Webb, Weatherford, and Robert S. Wheeler, Okmulgee, all '57eng, have joined Cities Service Oil Company's college graduate training school. They will become familiarized with the firm's overall operations, then be assigned to permanent jobs. Boyd will go into the purchasing department in Bartlesville; Harris to the gasoline division, Bartlesville; Webb to the Pampa, Texas, gasoline division, and Wheeler to the Russell, Kansas, production division.

**MARRIAGES:** Miss Jenny Lou Grimmer, '57ed, Sherman, Texas, and Clifford Melbourne James, Jr., Chickasha, were married August 10 in Sherman. He is a student at O. U., and they have made their home in Norman.

Miss Carolyn Rae Williamson, '57ed, Ada, and John Martin Burzio, '57bus, Henryetta, were married in August in Ada. They have made their home in Norman, where he is an O. U. law student.

Miss D'Arline Burk Robinson, '57ba, Oklahoma City, and Brent Lowell McDonald, Midland, Texas, were married August 24 in Oklahoma City. They have made their home in Lubbock, Texas, where he is enrolled in Texas Technological College.

Miss Wynona Mae Shrader, Cache, and Richard C. Gaworski, '57bus, Fairmont, Minnesota, were married June 15 in Lawton. They have made their home in Sand Springs. He is employed by a certified public accountant firm, Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Company of Tulsa.

Miss Barbara Sue Fahl, '57, Oklahoma City, and Geren Willard LaMonk, '57, Palmdale, California, were married June 29 in Oklahoma City, where they have made their home.

Miss Luella Lambert, '57ed, Lexington, and Larry Curtis Melton, '57, Purcell, were married June 14 in Lexington.

**DEATH:** Robert B. Brown, '57, Lindsay, was killed July 14 in an automobile accident near Ardmore. He was 21 and a senior at O. U. The accident occurred when Brown's car struck a cow, then bounded into the path of another car. Two other persons were killed and another, William L. Eakin, 21, Healdton senior, was critically injured.

## EDUCATION PROBLEMS

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spiritual revolution throughout the world."

It is not the contention here that a general education will answer such a call to duty and provides solutions for our institutional ailments, but it is evident that "specialization" alone will not do it. Here is definitely a problem of teaching all college students the necessity of understanding the threat to our standards of civilization. No names are mentioned, no insinuations are made but this bold statement should arouse the minds of those who are charged with the responsibility of curriculum studies and proposed changes. Such warnings are not isolated cases; they are all too prevalent. How soon teaching can be done to prepare students for this "reformation" is a question that will not wait a score of years for an answer. . . .

**I**N THE PROCESS of reconverting from a war to a peacetime schedule, Yale University, in 1946, introduced four new programs of study. A summer reading program became an integral part of the regular curriculum with regular examinations at the end of each vacation. New programs in the fields of Far Eastern and Russian studies are offered for the first time at the undergraduate level. The "intensive" method of language study is used in the language courses. The fourth field is "American Civilization" for both undergraduates and graduates. This program cuts across departmental lines.

West Virginia University instituted in the school year 1948-49 a complete program of Integrated Studies. . . . This program, which is optional, is designed for lower division courses and consists of four introductory general courses: Humanities, social sciences, biological sciences and physical sciences. Completion of two years' work in the four fields qualifies the student for the degree of associate in arts. Arrangements can be made whereby one major course may be started in the freshman year and at the end of four years the baccalaureate degree may be obtained.

It is generally observed that in practically every college or university where a program of general education is instituted several common problems and points for consideration arise. Of course not every institution of higher learning has all these problems, but they are general and must be met.

Directing a large number of students' efforts only in specialized fields prohibits the development of "intercultural under-

standing." This means, in part, that courses of wider interest, coupled with an appeal to maintain sustained interest, must be added or integrated with material already offered in courses. The latter is more economical if teachers who are capable of seeing the whole scope of learning can be found or trained for this task. Finding such teachers today is virtually an admitted impossibility. There remains then the problem of modifying the curricula by both subtraction and addition with the hope, which must be realized, that teachers will be trained in the future to perform the task of administering a general education.

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A special group of instructors should not be designated to teach general education courses to the exclusion of other courses. The field of general education should bear coordination with specialization. If the two fields are not coordinated the tendency would be for students, in some instances at least, to regard the general education courses as so many requirements to be met in order to begin their fields of special interest.

Practically everyone admits that our curricula in higher education have reached the saturation point. The introduction of new courses leads to further complications, but

a few fundamental courses will be satisfactory to introduce general education. As the field of general education develops, the modification of existing courses may help to solve the problem of enlarging the curricula. Yet every administrator knows that it is quite difficult for a classroom instructor to apply surgery to his set of lectures that have become as fixed as the calendar. So it will require an instructor who is sympathetic to serious modification of his courses—history, sociology, economics or humanistic studies—before an adequate change can be made. The chances, however, are much against this being done.

There remains then the alternative of training teachers for the task of teaching general education. This will require time.

It is increasingly evident that securing good teachers, or preparing the prospective teachers, to aid in equipping the college student with a general education, is a major problem. This phase of teacher selection aims at personality, attitudes, cooperation, and information possessed. He must skillfully and sympathetically transmit his own information, skillfully and sympathetically guide students in developing their own understanding and skillfully leave a topic when it is completed. Once a program of general education is agreed upon, the teacher personnel problem must be solved or there can be no inauguration of it.

Mention must be made of the fact that cooperation between the administration on one hand, from the president to the heads of departments, and the classroom teacher on the other is imperative, if any program succeeds. Especially is this true with general education which, as has been pointed out, is not only a partially new approach to a liberal education but also a new application of established principles.

Traditions hold fast in certain fields of higher education and everyone knows the prevailing opinions are to the effect that what was good 20 years ago is good enough now.

Another way of saying this is that a good selling job for general education must be done. This applies to the faculties involved as well as to the students.

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