

## **“The Research University and the Liberal Arts College” Conference**

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Monday Morning Panel (6/10): “Conceptualizing Education.”

### **“By Order of the God: The College, the Research University, and the Humanist Vocation”**

The college is one of the oldest institutions in the United States. It is also the incubator of another institution, not nearly as old, but whose importance in our society cannot be overstated: the research university.

In this paper, I want to sketch out, in very broad strokes, the history and evolution of the American college and to reflect on its complex relationship with the research university. Because there are so many different kinds of colleges, my historical overview will describe something like the “idea” of the college, rather than trace the development of the tremendous variety of institutions that today go by that name. The idea of the college is in striking ways uniquely American, and it is most distinctly visible in the history of the nation’s oldest colleges, which also tend to be the most elite—that is, wealthy, selective, and famous. Historically, these older colleges have led national trends and set the template for the development of American higher education.

The 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan migrants to the American colonies lost little time in setting up a college—the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony put aside the start-up capital of £400 in 1636, and John Harvard bequeathed the requisite real estate shortly thereafter. The founding college administrators also lost no time in launching a fundraising campaign, including the publication of a 26-page promotional pamphlet called *New England’s First Fruits* (1643). Words from that pamphlet are famously inscribed on a plaque outside one of the gates into Harvard Yard:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had built our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God’s worship, and settled the civil government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.<sup>1</sup>

So began what would become the world’s most successful system of higher education, which, at least for now, the United States’ continues to be. Perhaps the first thing to note from this remarkable passage is the religious origins of the American college. This is a point that I will come back to, but for now let me just indicate that these early commitments to personal and

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<sup>1</sup> *New England’s First Fruits* (1643), in Samuel Eliot Morison's *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1935), p. 432.

societal moral development hold important lessons for our thinking about the present and future place of the college in our society.

Another phrase in this passage that presages the themes of this paper is the phrase “to advance and perpetuate learning.” That commitment contains within it the two ideological poles that one must balance in designing any educational curriculum: one pole—“to advance leaning”—looks at the future. The other—“to perpetuate learning”—looks at the past. The impulse to educate people by looking at the past and the impulse to educate people by looking at the future, have coexisted on the same campuses and under the same names, with various degrees of tension and uneasy collaboration, from the very beginning of the American college.

Reflecting the irrepressible variety of religious convictions in the early colonies, nine colleges were chartered before the revolution: Harvard (1636), William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), The College of New Jersey (later Princeton, 1746), King’s College (later Columbia, 1754), The College of Philadelphia (later University of Pennsylvania, 1755), The College of Rhode Island (later Brown, 1764), Queens College (later Rutgers, 1766), and Dartmouth (1769).<sup>2</sup>

Despite these early institutional beginnings, when we think about college today we are really thinking about an institution that emerged in the post-World War II period, with the 1944 G.I. Bill providing the crucial impetus that shaped the educational landscape in which colleges became what we know them to be today.

Before the First World War, for instance, colleges enrolled essentially any person that came to them: there were no admissions offices, no formal application processes, no recruitment to speak of, and no specified admissions requirements. Typically, the process of securing entrance to a college involved not much more than a letter from the prospect’s parents or headmaster to the dean of a college introducing the candidate and blessing the endeavor. The student would then appear in the fall, take placement exams, and start his studies in the prescribed curriculum. In the early 1920’s, under the leadership of President Ernest M. Hopkins, Dartmouth College pioneered a selective admissions process. Among the nine factors of selection that President Hopkins outlined—and which included admitting the “Sons of Dartmouth Alumni and Dartmouth College Officers”—he felt compelled to note as the ninth principle that: “The entire class will be selected on the basis of qualifications and no one allowed to enter simply because he has secured rooming accommodations.”<sup>3</sup>

In a now well-known story, the new selectivity of colleges in the 20’s and 30’s immediately became a way to keep socially undesirable applicants out, which meant primarily, but not exclusively, Jews. “Character” became more important than “Scholarship” (intellectual potential) as an admission criterion, allowing colleges to reject anyone not deemed desirable on grounds of sociability. Throughout the 20’s and 30’s, colleges were indeed becoming increasingly selective, but not along criteria we would find acceptable today: nearly all of the applicants rejected in the period between the two World Wars were ethnic Americans,

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<sup>2</sup> Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004*, (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> David O. Levine, “Discrimination in College Admission,” in *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, reprinted in *The History of Higher Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Lester F. Goodchild and Harold S. Wechsler, Eds., (Boston: Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp. 511-512.

particularly urban Russian Jews, irrespective of academic qualifications. White Anglo Saxon Protestants, on the other hand, were essentially guaranteed admissions regardless of academic qualification. Affirmative action based on race and ethnicity, it is worth noting, is a not new phenomenon in American higher education.

Despite these exclusionary practices, the story of the American college, until very recently, is the story of progressively widening access to groups previously excluded. Even the pre-G.I. Bill era saw an aggressive growth in the number of Americans who attended college: Between 1870 and 1940, while the US population grew three-fold, the number of students enrolling in college grew 30-fold.<sup>4</sup>

The story of widening access took a major step forward with the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights or simply as the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill opened the doors of colleges to individuals who under the previous admissions regime would never have thought of pursuing higher education. It was an essential step towards the democratization of college, making the class and background of individuals who now attended college more representative of the American population than at any previous time. The Bill not only removed financial impediments for veterans to attend college, but it largely broke the prevailing association of class and privilege with college attendance.

By 1956, more than 2 million veterans had used the G.I. Bill's education benefit to enroll in a college or university.<sup>5</sup> The G.I. Bill also fueled the explosive growth of “junior colleges,” which in the 50’s and 60’s evolved into our national network community colleges. But the most important aspect of the G.I. Bill for the story American higher education is that it enshrined in federal legislation the almost uniquely American principle that the cost of college should not be an impediment for anyone who is otherwise able to attend. In effect, the G.I. Bill brought the federal government on board a movement to expand college access to all qualified individuals, regardless of their ability to pay.

In this narrative of expansion of access, without which we cannot understand the landscape of American colleges today, the next major landmark is the Higher Education Act of 1965. As Judith Eaton has put it, “The 1965 Higher Education Act extended the principle of financial assistance to the general population. If one were able to gain admission to a college or university, lack of money should not prevent you from attending.”<sup>6</sup> Specifically, Title IV of the Higher Education Act introduced the pillars of the system of financial aid prevalent at colleges and universities today: individual grants to low-income students (later, Pell grants), low-interest subsidized federal loans, work-study, federal institutional aid, and the Upward Bound and Talent Search programs for low-income high school students.

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<sup>4</sup> *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1946), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Olson, "The G. I. Bill and Higher Education: Success and Surprise," in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 5, (December 1973), 596-610.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Eaton, “The Evolution of Access Policy: 1965-1990,” in *American Higher Education: Purposes, Problems, and Public Perceptions*, Aspen Institute, 1992, p. 142.

The G.I. Bill and the Higher Education Act of 1965 laid down the rationale for the next step in the story of access: the open admissions movement of the early 70's. Open admissions seeks to remove one last obstacle from college enrollment: academic preparation. Not only should financial resources not prevent one from attending college, but even educational deficiencies should not stand in the way: *anyone* who wants a college education should be given the opportunity. Colleges, especially publicly funded ones, should invest in remedial and academic supports where necessary, such that even students with inadequate academic preparation have a clear and feasible path to college graduation.

This is an extraordinary, remarkable story of expanding access to college. I would wager that each of us who teach at the college level, teach students every semester who would not be in our classrooms were it not for these remarkable social commitments. Indeed, many of us would not have been able to attend college, much less teach at one, were it not for these public investments in opening up college admission to individuals and families without disposable income to invest in higher education.

This trajectory of expanding access is in large part responsible for the tremendous variety of institutions in our society that answer to the "college" moniker. To name just some of the major types, we have: small private liberal arts colleges, small denominational colleges, undergraduate units in large research universities, community colleges, women's colleges, historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's), and most recently, on-line and for-profit colleges. This diversity in the kinds of institutions that have inherited the mantle of the early American college makes it hard to generalize about the nature of college. Yet, without upholding any individual school as paradigmatic, some things can be learned about the essence of the college idea by looking at its relationship to the research university, and in particular, by looking at research universities that formed around the nucleus of old liberal arts colleges.

In considering the emergence of the research university, two key historical moments deserve special notice. The first is The Morrill Act of 1862, signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. Under the Morrill Act, the federal government helped establish a network of "land grant" colleges whose curriculums put particular emphasis on agricultural and mechanical knowledge. The Act specified such specialization and had the explicit goal of extending college education beyond the traditional privileged classes. The Act reads, in part,

...without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.<sup>7</sup>

The second pivotal moment in creating the conditions for the emergence of the research university comes in 1869, when, fast on the heels of this federal intervention to both democratize higher education and to move it in the direction of practical scientific study, Harvard College introduced the "elective system," under the direction of President Charles W. Eliot. The colonial

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<sup>7</sup> *United States Code*, Sec. 304

model in place at Harvard had been oriented towards introducing young men to the most important ideas of the past and present, with a decided emphasis of classical learning—Greek and Latin—and Christian theology. But this orientation changed dramatically under President Eliot. To simplify a much more complex story, the original mission of the colonial college was abandoned in favor of a new model developed in the great German research universities. This new model tended towards specialization, scientific accumulation of knowledge, and forward-looking research.

Eliot’s “elective system” eliminated the lock-step classical curriculum at Harvard and allowed students to pursue areas of concentration that were suited to their tastes and talents. This re-orientation had a major impact on the development of undergraduate curricula in American colleges. Among other important changes, the elective system allowed faculty to teach only within their specialty, creating the institutional framework for today’s division of colleges into academic departments where faculty and students can focus on specialized questions and fields. This system of elective courses offered within departmental specialties is still, more or less, what Harvard offers as its Program in General Education and what most colleges have adopted as the method of fulfilling the variously prescribed degree requirements.

Eliot’s intuition that the education of the young in the common classical curriculum of the colonial college had become obsolete in a fast changing, knowledge-driven world, proved correct by its own success. It re-invigorated Harvard College and, indeed, introduced modernity into American higher education as a whole. A scientist himself, Eliot brought into the undergraduate curriculum the paradigm of cumulative growth in knowledge by which the sciences advance. He noted this link when defending the system of electives: “It is one of the most important functions of universities to store up the accumulated knowledge of the race, and so to use these stores that each successive generation of youth shall start with all the advantages which their predecessors have won.”<sup>8</sup> Eliot introduced a desperately needed change in undergraduate education, placing the production and accumulation of practical knowledge squarely inside the college mission.

In summary, the institution we know today as the college is the result of a progressive expansion in access and a move towards specialization instead of classics-based liberal studies. Looking at this history, and reflecting on the state of higher education today, the question that we all have to be asking is whether the idea of the college, whose purest embodiment is the small liberal arts school, is a historical anomaly, a kind of institutional accident that is now fated to disappear as higher education becomes more specialized, more research-oriented, and more instrumentally tied to the job market.

### The College Idea

The college has lived with the threat of marginalization since it gave birth to the research university in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, liberal education, the intellectual milk of the college, has for several generations seemed on its last institutional legs; indeed, its strange persistence on the precipice of demise appears to be one of its most enduring characteristics.

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<sup>8</sup> *Educational Reform: Essays and Addresses*, The Century Co., The De Vinne Press, New York, 1898, p. 143.

The formative debates about the relationship between colleges and the universities that grew up around them were, at bottom, debates about liberal versus specialized education, and as the research university assumed the prominence that it holds today, the college became a kind of refuge from professionalization; a place that held to the idea of human cultivation as an end in itself and not as a means to either a career or the pure advancement of knowledge. The college has been the natural home of generalists and individuals committed to liberal learning as well as the launching pad for a certain kind of public intellectual. But that commitment to liberal learning and to general questions that lies at the heart of the college has always been a precarious footing on which to stand. Today, with the rise of the university and with the ascendancy of market values, the idea of “the college” is what one might call a hard sell.

In the preface to a 1966 study of the college, Daniel Bell was already sounding the alarm: “The idea of a four-year college as a breathing space, as a means of testing oneself and finding out who and what one is—the process of self-consciousness as *Bildung*—is vanishing as organizational harnesses are slipped on the young at an even earlier and earlier stage.”<sup>9</sup>

The trends that Bell observed in *The Reforming of General Education*—trends that appear to be embedded in the deep logic of free market capitalism dominant in our culture—have only become more pronounced since he noted them almost 50 years ago. It is not hard to see that the idea of learning for its own sake, separated from the need to earn a living—or, indeed, separated from reference to any end at all—will sit ill at ease in a liquid society like ours, where there is enormous pressure to monetize all value. There is no way around the fact that economic efficiency and maximizing the earning potential of every individual are dominant cultural values, and that these values cut against the very idea of a liberal, non-specialized education. There is a deep antagonism between the cultural logic of the marketplace and the animating insights of liberal education. Market values will always disdain the uselessness of the liberal arts, while the liberal arts will always disdain the shallowness and mendacity of materialist culture. This debate is at a particularly heated phase at the moment, with increasing public pressure on colleges to justify their exorbitant costs and colleges all around the country waking up to the fact they are operating under an unsustainable business model.

The goals of a liberal education are, by definition, non-professional. But as market forces relentlessly invade every corner of life, the idea of a non-applied education becomes more and more strange. In my work with low-income college-bound high school students, I am always struck by the blank looks I get when I suggest that the main point of college isn’t to prepare them for a job. Many students can’t imagine, and many families can’t imagine, what else could possibly be the point. I confess that it is very hard to tell them what the point is; it is very hard to communicate the value of a liberal education by means of persuasion. The only effective mode of communication about the meaning of the liberal arts is contagion. The process is one of transmission rather than admonition. What works with low-income high school students is what works with everyone else: *doing* liberal education. After a three-week intensive seminar studying ancient, enlightenment, and contemporary philosophical texts, I don’t have to tell them about the value of a liberal education. They know.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in Its National Context*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966) p. xx.

Today, colleges face a far-threat in the form of institutional marginality or irrelevance, and a near-threat in the form of intellectual and disciplinary fragmentation.

The problem that worried Bell in his 1966 study was “the disintegration of the curriculum” which he saw unfolding in many liberal arts colleges.<sup>10</sup> His observation was accurate, and it was only the beginning: from the late 60’s to the early 90’s, colleges saw a colossal breakdown of consensus as to what students should learn. The idea of the unity of knowledge upon which any non-arbitrary curriculum must be premised, has faced serious epistemological challenges in the last 40 years, especially from literary theory and its kindred discourses. As a result, there is tremendous incoherence among liberal arts curricula today. Most colleges lack an organized program of study so that an undergraduate education can easily devolve into an incoherent assemblage of courses and a major. This is the threat of disciplinary fragmentation.

As for the threat of institutional marginality, the research university, immediately after its emergence in the post-Civil War period, tried to dispense the college. In the case of Johns Hopkins, as is well known, the university was originally founded without a college at all, and President Daniel Coit Gilman only came around to the idea of an undergraduate program after considerable pressure. In 1888, Harvard historian Edward Channing advised President Eliot that “the College ought to be suppressed or moved out into the country where it would not interfere with the proper work of the University.”<sup>11</sup> Over at the University of Chicago, in his inaugural address in November 1929, Robert Hutchins acknowledged that that “At times...members of the Faculty have urged that we withdraw from undergraduate work, or at least the first two years of it.”<sup>12</sup> And at Columbia, the College barely survived repeated presidential attempts at its dissolution as the university took shape around it.

As these examples show—and many more, both old and contemporary, could be conjured—despite the fact that many colleges live within a university and gain extraordinary advantages from that situation, the missions of the two institutions stand in stark contrast to each other. They may share the same name, campus, faculty, and even have inextricably tied budgets, but the missions of colleges and universities respectively are not obviously compatible and, in effect, are often in conflict over limited human and material resources.<sup>13</sup>

To summarize the difference: the university is a center of research and innovation, while the college is a center of teaching and self-actualization. Columbia College Dean Herbert

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<sup>10</sup> P. xxiii.

<sup>11</sup> McCaughey, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Bell, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, to the public, in many of the most prominent universities, only the college is visible. The undergraduate residential college receives most of the public attention not least because the undergraduate college carries within an incubus in the form of semi-professional athletic leagues. (I use the word “incubus” to describe these semi-professional athletic leagues advisedly. As far as I know, it was first used in this context by Jacques Barzun in a 2001 piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. It fits perfectly).

Hawkes put it bluntly in 1922: “The student is the focus of the undergraduate college,”<sup>14</sup> with the implicit contrast that in the university the *subject* or *discipline* is the focus. In his recent book on colleges, Andrew Delbanco has also put it eloquently: “[The College] is about transmitting knowledge of and from the past to undergraduate students so they may draw upon it as a living resource in the future. . . . [The University] is mainly an array of research activities conducted by faculty and graduate students with the aim of creating new knowledge in order to supersede the past.”<sup>15</sup>

### Teaching

While there are real mutual benefits to be had from colleges and universities existing under the same umbrella, we should not equivocate in acknowledging that these two institutions live in different worlds, and have different meanings. In universities with strong colleges within them, one generally finds the faculty divided roughly along the lines of those who care more about their subject, and those who care more about the students to whom they teach their subject. A different way of marking this distinction among the faculty is as between those who hold a conception of their occupation—their profession, their calling—that revolves around their pedagogical role, as opposed to those who see themselves primarily as researchers. These two types of faculty identity, in the best of cases, feed off each other and strengthen each other, but in reality such synergy is quite unusual and there exist few institutional incentives to making it more common. It is a rare bird indeed who manages to synthesize the research and pedagogical roles of a professor in a top-tier research university. Fifty years ago, Clark Kerr was already pointing to what he called the “cruel paradox” that “a superior faculty results in an inferior concern for undergraduate teaching.”<sup>16</sup> Many qualifications can be offered, and have been offered, to Kerr’s paradox, but the basic fact remains that when we talk about the university, we talk of research, and when we talk about the college, we talk of teaching.

Given the structure of professional incentives, undergraduate teaching is usually a dead-end track in the research university: it is not the road to professional advancement. Beyond the fact that dedication to teaching rarely garners professional rewards, great, inspired teaching tends to be viewed with apprehension; to be a great teacher of undergraduates in a research university is a dubious distinction indeed. The exceptional teacher is able to form deep and dangerous personal connections with a large number of young people, and through this connection transmit knowledge and intellectual refinement. But the psychology that makes this possible is suspect, betraying perhaps too desperate a wish to be loved.

Here, by “teaching,” I don’t mean lecturing. A high resolution screen can lecture just as well as a human being. But, as of yet, machines cannot teach in the sense that a teacher can; it is the very humanity of the teacher that makes him or her effective. The teacher, as Andrew Delbanco has put it “is a person inflamed, even possessed, in a way that can never be certified by

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<sup>14</sup> Bell, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Delbanco, *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *The Uses of the University*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001, 1963), p. 49.



any advanced degree.”<sup>17</sup> Teachers must be on fire; they have to be burning. They must be in search of self-knowledge with exemplary intensity and keep asking fundamental questions as if for the first time. They must teach *through* books, not *about* books. As Emerson put it in the Divinity School Address: “It is the office of the true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, no spake.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite professional disincentives, one still finds this kind of inspired teaching among the regular faculty at research universities. Indeed, I would guess that every reader of this paper has encountered at least one such figure. But I fear they are becoming more and more rare. Since 1990, for instance, expenditures on instruction have risen more slowly than an other category of spending at both public and private colleges.<sup>19</sup> This is related to the well-documented adjunctification of teaching, whereby a vast army of teachers has been allowed into the research university as second-class citizens in charge of undergraduate education.

### The Function of the College

I want to end this paper by offering some thoughts about why the college continues to play an indispensable role within the landscape of higher education and even, perhaps especially, within the research university.

Samuel Johnson, the first President of King’s College (which after the Revolution changed its name to the more patriotic Columbia) in advertising the opening of the college in 1754 declared that its aim would be: “...to lead them [the pupils] from the study of nature to the knowledge of themselves, and of the God of nature, and their duty to Him, themselves, and one another, and everything that can contribute to their true happiness, both here and hereafter.”<sup>20</sup>

Note the moral ends of the college, and note the proposition that the study of nature—whose variegated and multiple forms would become the province of the research university—is proposed as a vehicle of self-knowledge and of an appreciation of mutual obligations. As a society, we have made astonishing progress in the kind of knowledge Samuel Johnson included in his designation of “the study of nature.” But we have made little progress, and perhaps have regressed, in the type of self-knowledge and appreciation of mutual obligations that he saw as the ultimate aim of the college. Yet the relevance of those moral aims has not ceased; we continue to feel—and the young tend to feel it with special urgency—a burning call to developing our inner selves and the irresistible conviction that, to use Jesus’ words, life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment.

The college remains the moral center of the university. The fundamental issues at stake in a college education are not essentially scholarly, but essentially existential. The basic mission

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<sup>17</sup> Lapham’s *Quarterly*, Fall 2008, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> Whicher, *Address*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Geiger and Donald Heller, cited in *The Economist*, Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, “Higher education: Not what it used to be.”

<sup>20</sup> Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, eds., *American Higher Education: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 110-111.

of the college is not epistemological but ethical; the college is the place where the university must concern itself not with what we know, but with the meaning of knowledge. College education remains, at bottom, a meta-disciplinary. The college has no disciplinary concerns as such, and this is the reason why the undergraduate college is the natural home of the liberal arts—a field of study that can only be considered a discipline by analogy but which, in fact, is the opposite of an academic discipline. As Jacques Barzun pointed out in a 2001 piece “To be of any worth, the liberal arts...must also be taught as arts, not as scholarly disciplines—and that must be done by teachers. The present system, which favors faculty research over teaching, turns the liberal arts into professional subjects.”<sup>21</sup>

In his foreword to Bell’s *The Reforming of General Education*, Columbia College Dean David Truman remarked that “General education programs, whatever their individual form and content, ... [imply]... acceptance by the colleges of a responsibility for setting priorities among types of knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> The existence of a college inside a university requires of the academic illuminati, much as they may dislike it, to make certain epistemological and ethical commitments that are embodied in the structure of the curriculum, the requirements for the degree, the staffing of undergraduate courses, and the resources that are allocated to the student programs. The 1945 Harvard report on general education (the famous “Red Book”) gets at this critical role of the college within the university by noting that the term general education: “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.” Elsewhere, the writers add the penetrating observation that “General education is the appreciation of the organic complex of relationships which gives meaning and point to the specialty.”<sup>23</sup> In short, the college inside the research university forces these leading centers of research to grapple with and give institutional form to a vision of the ultimate ends of education and of human development.

While the college, I am arguing, belongs in the research university (though not exclusively there), the “knowledge” produced by the college, like the knowledge that concerned Socrates of old, belongs in the street and in the marketplace. The college concerns itself with a kind of humanistic “knowledge” that is otherwise not the proper business of the research university. In fact, the phrase “humanistic research” is a sort of oxymoron, or, at least, a tenuous extension of the meaning of the word as used in the term “research university.” Montaigne, explaining why he wrote “essays”—that is, “attempts” or “explorations”—noted: “Could my mind find a firm footing, I should not be making essays, but coming to conclusions; it is, however, always in its apprenticeship and on trial.”<sup>24</sup> The subject of humanistic inquiry is not a proper object for research because the instruments and conditions of the “research” are themselves part of the inquiry.

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Barzun, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Trim the College?—A Utopia!,” June 22, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> P. x

<sup>23</sup> Pp. 51, 195.

<sup>24</sup> Michele de Montaigne *Essays*, J.M. Cohen, Trans., (New York: Penguin Books, 1958) p. 235.

The “knowledge” of the college then, like Socrates, belongs in the street and in the marketplace. Socrates went around asking the young people of his day: “Are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?”<sup>25</sup> Can we utter the word “wisdom” in the research university? The word truth? Can one speak about the state of people’s souls? These categories sit awkwardly in scholarly discourse, but they are the life blood of the college vocation. The college within the research university is there to keep alive—and to invent anew with each generation—a vocabulary through which we can explore what it means to be human.

The rise and dominance of science in our universities and the importance of technology and of specialized knowledge in our society do not answer the fundamental questions that persist by virtue of our being human. The essential dilemmas of existence and of human consciousness are not so different today than they were 100 or 200 years ago, or, in fact, than they were in the Middle Ages or in Antiquity. From the first emergence of consciousness, through the development of communal life and the progress of civilization in any definition, the questions with which we define our value systems, structure our pursuits, and organize our vision for the future are fundamentally the same. These ultimate questions pervade our everyday life, and the college is their institutional home within academia.

In a 1964 article for *Deadalus*, William De Vane, former dean of Yale College, spoke of “the hidden and instinctive wisdom of the American college” namely, creating a space for “unforced intellectual maturing.”<sup>26</sup> This unforced intellectual maturing is a key to innovation and creativity, especially in our increasingly interconnected, knowledge-driven society. Without implying that the value for our society of maintaining and strengthening the of college is to be measured by these achievements, I venture to note that Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, Napster, not to speak of innovations politics, music, and the arts, have been hatched in the “unforced intellectual” social milieu of the college.

The college continues to have a vital role in our society and, as I have argued, inside the research university. Those of us who are committed to its continued vitality must struggle against institutional, professional, and economic forces that threaten to erode it or drive to irrelevance. By way of encouragement in this endeavor, I end with another quote from Socrates, the archetypal model of the college teacher: “And if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things. I shall treat in this way anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger, and more so the citizens because you are more kindred to me. Be sure that this is what

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<sup>25</sup> Plato, *The Death and Trial of Socrates*, G.M.A. Grube, Tans. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), (29e), p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> William C. De Vane, “The College of Liberal Arts”, *Deadalus*, fall 1964.

the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing to the city than my service to the god."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> (30a), p. 32.