

THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

October 30, 1984

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Faculty
FROM: Patrick Hill *PJH*
RE: Evergreen Colloquium

The first meeting of the Evergreen Colloquium was well attended. Over 40 faculty participated in the discussion of Evergreen and Santa Cruz. Consistent with our promise to keep these colloquia going as long as faculty interest continues, we will hold the second Evergreen Colloquium as scheduled on Wednesday, November 7 from 3:00 - 5:00 PM in Library 1612.

The reading for this meeting is my own, "Communities of Learners: Curriculum as the Infrastructure of Academic Communities." This article describes the Federated Learning Communities: the daughter/son of Evergreen's Coordinated Studies which I directed at Stony Brook. The model has now been replicated at nine other colleges and universities, small ones like Rollins and Denison and large universities like Maryland and Tennessee. The Exxon Foundation will likely be sponsoring a major conference next year to disseminate the model further. Since Evergreen's Coordinated Studies was the inspiration for this model, I believe it is something you would like to know about. I will ask, "What, if anything, might the parent learn from the child?" But my primary focus will be on the common ideas which animate both Coordinated Studies and the FLC model.

The meeting will be chaired by David Marr. The article is attached. (Please note: the duplication is financed by my grant, not by state funds which are far too low to support this endeavor.)

PJH:k1
Attachment

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS: CURRICULUM AS THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

PATRICK J. HILL

At Stony Brook, the downstate center of the State University of New York, a novel approach to undergraduate education emerged in 1976: the Federated Learning Communities (FLC). Its total approach represented a structural break with curricular rationale and organization of the past. In effect, FLC created a new medium or environment for undergraduate education within a traditional university.

The emergence of FLC was preceded by a highly critical institutional self-study.¹ A summary of the undergraduate section of that self-study, entitled "The Eclipse of the Academic Community," provides a useful introduction to the rationale of FLC's complex structure.² This study explains the diminished vitality in undergraduate education in terms of three phenomena: the mismatched expectations of faculty and our new, traditional campus students as to the nature of undergraduate education, the atomization of the curriculum, and the resulting "privatized" character of academic experience.

MISMATCHED EXPECTATIONS

Students and faculty bring very different expectations into the undergraduate classroom.³ The hopes of many of our current

From In Opposition to Core Curriculum, ed. James W. Hall with Barbara Keveles (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982).

undergraduates, at least the traditional eighteen- to twenty-two year-olds, focus on four major areas: (1) a link between their studies and postcollege careers; (2) the acquisition of insights applicable for the understanding of their personal lives and the great and pressing issues of our time; (3) faculty responsiveness to their ideas in face-to-face learning situations; and (4) initiative or outreach on the part of the faculty to arouse interest and motivate study. In brief, the students expect an academic community responsive to their presence.⁴ Faculty, by way of contrast, often expect: (1) a considerable overlap of their specialized professional life with their teaching activities; (2) a predisposition of at least the good students toward the worth of the faculty's activities and interests; and (3) that scholarly and well-organized presentations in the classroom of some version of their professional research constitute the greatest part of their responsibilities as teachers.

Needless to say, at least some of these conflicting expectations are going to be frustrated. A small number of programs in the curricula of most American colleges lead students to a definable career. In addition, faculty often conduct classes in ways that eliminate a student's exploration of personal values or life's basic truth, for example, by dismissing questions as unmanageable, by referring them to other departments, or by offering answers that are "only" probable or partial. Further, faculty-student exchanges are hampered by cultural differences about the value of reading, gratification postponement, or the worth of the vocation dedicated to inquiry. The gradual frustration of student and faculty expectations leads to a lessened enthusiasm for coursework, mutual withdrawal from energetic classroom work and communication, and finally minimal cooperation in fulfilling course obligations. For many students, original motivations to find career and personal direction through courses and dynamic exchanges in a community of learners are lost in the unresponsive academic environment of many college campuses. For many faculty, teaching becomes boring, or it focuses on smaller and smaller numbers of responsive students.

ATOMIZATION OF THE CURRICULUM

The contemporary curriculum frustrates the expectations of undergraduates and their faculty in other more subtle ways. The

staggeringly comprehensive curriculum bewilders the unfocused or searching undergraduate. In small colleges, there are often twenty different majors, and two or three times that number are offered in large universities. Minimal distribution requirements at best expose the student to still more options, and the centrifugal proliferation of specialized courses in those disciplines (for example, philosophy or history) that traditionally have addressed the fundamental or shared dimensions of being human further undermines possibilities in the curriculum for addressing student expectations.⁵ This bewildering array of options tells many young undergraduates that all courses are equally important or unimportant.

However, the sheer number of courses and options is not the only or even the primary source of the curriculum's frustration of student and faculty expectations. More significant is the *atomized* nature of the curriculum, that is, the absence of obvious and meaningful relationships or interaction among the numerous courses. Aside from departmental sequences (mostly in the natural sciences), each course stands virtually on its own. Little or no use is made of the material from one course by others. The student is deprived of any curricular support system that might reinforce the importance of what is being discussed in that single course. Where occasional overlap occurs, it is frequently undercut by the unique interpretations endemic to creative faculty members. The student is left with no interpretation of the educational enterprise other than that each faculty member is "doing his or her own thing." The student may not be far from wrong. In effect, all intellectual endeavor reduces de facto to matters of taste. Such a reduction is self-defeating and destructive to the possibility of students taking ideas seriously and using them to understand themselves, others, or their environment.⁶

Although television's consumer orientation has often been blamed as the reason students reduce intellectual matters to judgments of taste, little attention has been paid to how much college curricula reinforce the value of taste as supreme. There is nearly a total absence of required comparisons or integration of courses presumed by the curriculum. While professors will almost automatically ask that students compare or contrast ideas within their course, almost nothing in the undergraduate experience forces students to compare or contrast courses, disciplines, or ideas from

separate courses. Each course (in some cases, the department itself) is hermetically sealed. Such rigid divisions encourage the view that the life of the mind is not an objectively based and meaningful activity, but rather is a consumer-oriented performance on the part of individualized, idiosyncratic professors. Such is the apparent meaning of the atomistic undergraduate curriculum for the academically unfocused undergraduate.

The atomized curriculum, it should be noted, is not *necessarily* productive of an incoherent education. It should be remembered that we are describing the personally unfocused young student who lacks an academic heritage and who constitutes perhaps 50 percent of today's undergraduate population. For the more mature student with academic focus and rich life experiences on which to draw, the abundance of courses in the curriculum can be a great resource and an opportunity for a coherent education. Indeed, what might appear to an outsider as a set of incoherent courses is often quite coherent to the focused student. A course on Goethe, one on economic development, a third in elementary Spanish, a fourth on basic ecology, and a fifth on urban planning make abundant sense to one planning to work in Third World cities and interested in the dynamic of humanity's attempt to model nature to its own purposes. How the situation of such adult learners relates to that of the younger adult, and what implications that relation has for understanding the sources of coherence in the curriculum will be explored below.

PRIVATIZATION OF ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Ultimately, the mismatched expectations of faculty and students within the context of an expanding and atomized curriculum results in "privatization" of academic experience: not only is experience individualized, but it also is unshared and unpublic. Almost all essential dimensions of a vital academic community, in addition to shared expectations and minimal interactions, are undermined. Shared experiences are at a minimum in academia. It is rare for students to interact after having read the same book, prepared for the same exam, or taken the same course. There is no sense of working together toward a common goal. The possibility of a common intellectual language is lessened so that highly creative

work by faculty within a single discipline is likely unintelligible to the student body at large and to many faculty colleagues. Finally, the minimal condition of academic community, that is, faculty-student contact, is largely undermined as each party utilizes the absence of structure to pursue private ends. Although most of the disciplines being taught at our universities understand human growth in terms of interaction with a challenging environment and would endorse John Dewey's judgment that "no man and no mind was ever emancipated merely by being left alone," the actual organization of the curriculum and of extracurricular activities endorses the discredited view of human growth as an autodigestive unfolding of innate potential.

What response on the part of the institution would properly overcome the mismatched expectations of faculty and students, the atomization of the curriculum, and the consequently privatized academic experience? It was a difficult, delicate, and fundamentally philosophical task. Which, if any, student and faculty expectations were to be encouraged? In what form, what proportion? Clearly, the students' expectation that it was faculty's responsibility to motivate them was not to be wholly encouraged. But what of the students' desire for face-to-face contact with faculty members in an intellectual community? Was that viable or outdated? Were faculty preferences for specialization rather than holistic inquiry to be tolerated?

My own thinking about contemplated reforms was considerably influenced by the parallels I saw between the city and the university. In one American tradition spanning Thomas Jefferson to Ralph Borsodi, urban life is described in basically negative terms of impersonality, anonymity, rootlessness, and overchoice. To these thinkers, the *gemeinschaften* of bygone days or projected utopian communities are the only human alternatives to the moral, social, and aesthetic grossness of the modern city. In another tradition, represented by thinkers like Dewey, Richard Sennett, John McDermott, and Harvey Cox, the city is the imperfect realization of the central values of modernity, namely, individual freedom, mobility, plurality, democracy, and specialized function.⁷ The passing of the homogeneous, agriculturally based society of past centuries lamented by the antiurbanites is viewed by these thinkers

as a release from the cloying bondage of small, confining, monolithic communities. What in modern cities strikes antiurban thinkers as rootless and impersonal appears to the prourbanites as opportunity for free movement among diverse life-styles and the potential to select from a wealth of options those promising the most growth.

What is to be learned from each tradition? From the antiurbanites we learn of the flaws in the organization of our large-scale institutions, flaws so fundamental as to deprive the citizen of the support systems and the incentive for the humane realization of the values we associate with modernity. From the prourbanites, we learn that the alternative is not a return to preindustrial communities based on only holistic human relationships and homogeneous values. Individual freedom, plurality, anonymity, mobility, specialization—these all are values worth preserving. So in the most general terms, both city and university are charged with the task of creating new structures of association. This new social organization would make readily available the benefits of human association without deprecating the aforementioned modern values. With reference to higher education, our major malaise stems not from excessive specialization, a plethora of courses, or unlimited student freedom but rather from social atomism: the lack of vital interaction among specialized courses and the absence of support, guidance, and preparation for the intelligent use of freedom in a pluralistic setting. With the invaluable assistance of a major grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, this institutional diagnosis led to the creation of the Federated Learning Communities at Stony Brook.

The Federated Learning Communities

The depth and the nature of the problems described above, along with the sensitivity to modern values, warranted experimentation with new structures. The structures of FLC are essentially new modes of academic community, new bases for disciplinary and human relationships, for vital dialog and communal inquiry, for invention, for sharing and support in the process of learning. Professional educators will recognize one or another of the modes as having been tried elsewhere, but the configuration of all these

elements in a total structure, we believe, represents a new medium of undergraduate education. The exposition of FLC will be organized around the program's four curricular innovations:

FEDERATION OF DISCIPLINARY COURSES

First, we decided to address the social atomism of university life by the federation of thematically overlapping but disciplinary diverse courses into an integrated semester.

The question of *what* to federate was as important as the decision to federate. Two critical choices were made, both of which can be seen as consistent with the general guidelines described above. The first choice was to federate already existing courses (or at least already existing interests) of the Stony Brook faculty. A new academic community was thus built on routine or everyday activities of both faculty and students. To have done otherwise, most flagrantly through the creation of small and specially designed interdisciplinary courses, would have run the risk of psychological and institutional marginality and would have created a refuge for the students, a warm and holistic nest disconnected from the mainstream of the university and thus from many of the values of modernity.

The second choice on what to federate was made with an eye to the value of plurality. The idea of federation might have been used within just one or two divisions of the university. But the central concern to bring the plural disciplines and ideologies of the university into communication and to introduce students to that dialog necessitated that FLC draw on the three traditional divisions of the university and on as many majors as possible. FLC thus attempted to become a *microcosm* of the resources of the university.

The third choice as to what to federate was made with an eye to the students' expectation that their college education would contribute to their understanding of the great and pressing issues of our time. This decision seemed at first to exclude several departments, but ways were found to include history, Stony Brooks's period-oriented literature departments, and the natural sciences in all of the first five FLC programs. Thus, despite the focus on "relevant" contemporary issues, the students could be introduced to the value of historical and literary understanding.

From the standpoint of the faculty, federation takes the form of

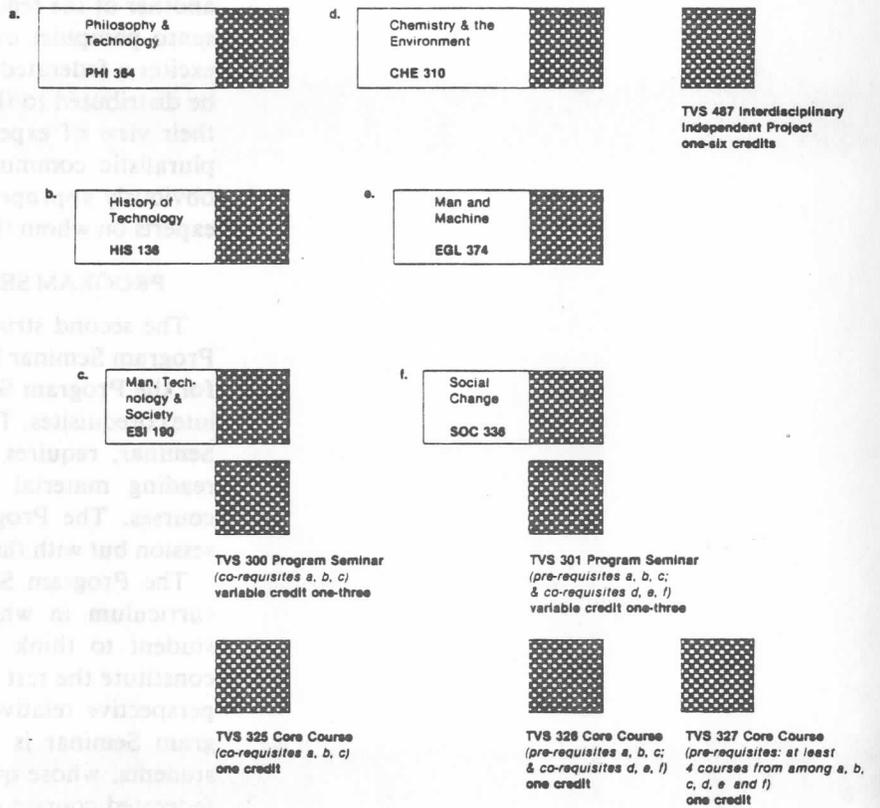
a weekly seminar wherein individuals explore each other's disciplines, develop a passing recognition of the basic vocabulary and concerns of one's federated colleagues, and, most importantly, search out overlapping and mutually implicatory material that would keep the courses in relation with one another. The act of federation diminishes the autonomy of the individual courses. The diminishment is for the most part voluntary and results from unanticipated and somewhat uncontrollable consequences of genuine dialog.

From the standpoint of the students, the most immediate impact of federation is that a thematically coherent group of three courses from different disciplines becomes the unit of education, rather than individuated courses or sequentially spread departmental progressions. Two consecutive semesters with six different disciplines constitute the heart of an FLC program. Figure 3 illustrates the FLC program on "Technology, Values, and Society," which federates philosophy, history, and engineering courses in its first semester and chemistry, sociology, and literature in its second.

The act of federation makes the course come alive for the students. The disciplines are no longer experienced as arbitrary dissections of the world but are experienced as complementary perspectives or a shared problem. In those FLC semesters that worked the best, the courses not only raised but addressed continually from week to week the themes of the program. One course frequently took the lead in this respect, implicating the others and forcing response. A good deal of confusion resulted from differing ideological and disciplinary perspectives, but the confusion was focused and manageable. Great difficulty remained, of course, for both faculty and students to effect a shared, even a personal integration of the thematic material. But the students experienced from week to week the real interaction of the disciplines and their own growing sophistication in understanding the thematic problem.

Another less obvious implication of federation is the creation of multiple authority figures. More often than not, the multiple professorial authority figures support and complement one another. They are all obviously committed to the value of inquiry, to the importance of the program's thematic focus, and to a whole range of specific values and thinkers. Infrequently, but significantly, the

FIGURE 3



KEY: The large rectangles (a, b, c, d, e, f) represent the six departmental courses federated into the TVS program. The shaded areas represent TVS students. In the large courses, both TVS students and the general student population are enrolled. The smaller squares represent the unique components of the TVS program: the Program Seminar taught by the Master Learner, the team-taught Core Course, and the Interdisciplinary Study Project. In these courses, only TVS students may enroll.

multiple authority figures come into conflict. A professor dismisses a question about the ethical or developmental significance of the Chinese social experiment only to have a question returned in the next class buttressed with the authority of a professor teaching another of the federated courses. Or a professor distributes a Monsanto pamphlet on the role of chemicals in everyday life, which excites a federated colleague to write a refutation and to request it be distributed to the class. The students cannot avoid refashioning their view of expertise. With the assistance of the pressures of a pluralistic community, they live day to day with the ambiguity obviously appropriate to the situation. There are no unquestioned experts on whom they can rely to remove the ambiguity.⁸

PROGRAM SEMINAR

The second structural innovation of FLC is a Meta Seminar or Program Seminar built on the three federated courses. Registration for the Program Seminar lists the three federated courses as absolute corequisites. The Program Seminar, sometimes called the Meta Seminar, requires fairly heavy writing and participation, but no reading material not already assigned in the three federated courses. The Program Seminar is like the traditional discussion session but with three rather than one course as its academic base.

The Program Seminar is an open or a reflective space in the curriculum in which time and assistance are provided for the student to think about the relationships among the parts that constitute the rest of his or her education and to define a personal perspective relative to those parts. What is discussed in the Program Seminar is for the most part determined by the enrolled students, whose questions and difficulties about relating the three federated courses constitute the agenda. A few examples illustrate the nature and academic purpose of the Program Seminar. In the program on World Hunger, the federated courses in economics and ecology at different times during the semester discussed the problem of exploitation. The contrasting accounts, inspired by different disciplinary and ideological perspectives, were brought up for discussion in the Program Seminar. And the philosophy course with its Kantian perspective was utilized to explore the differences. The discussion was relayed back to the professors and resulted in a

modification of a final exam to allow students to draw on their multicurricular perspectives.

A glance at Figure 3 might crystallize the manner in which the Program Seminar creates the possibility of shared academic experience. While there might be 300 or 400 students enrolled in the federated course, the Program Seminar has an upper limit of 40 students with multiple sections when necessary. The Program Seminar, because of its comparative smallness and its rigid corequisite structure, becomes an academic center wherein people who share academic experience become known to one another. In the ordinary course of registration patterns, a dozen students might register for two or three of the federated courses. But without the Program Seminar as an academic center, those students would not know that they were in the same courses nor would they have the opportunity or the assistance to tap the educational resources of intelligent dialog. Those resources, termed by my colleague, Charles Hoffmann, as FLC's "multiplier effect," are highly appreciated by the students, who regard their student community as an academic resource quite as valuable as that of the faculty. Higher education, with respect to graduate education, has acknowledged for some time that much of what students learn comes from other students. In undergraduate education, for a host of reasons, the academic resources of a student community have for the most part gone untapped.

In terms of curricular organization, the Program Seminar functions mainly to provide the opportunity for public reflection on the shared academic experience of the federated courses. In pedagogical terms, the Program Seminar has two additional functions. First, the Seminar encourages students to utilize the disciplinary resources of courses and the interdisciplinary resources of community to develop their own ideas and perspectives on the content of the federated course materials. The assignments always demand that students attempt to do something their teachers have not done, that is, to bring the resources of the federated disciplinary courses into interdisciplinary relation around a subtheme of the students' choice.

Second, the Program Seminar functions as a reliable cybernetic mechanism. Far too much of our teaching proceeds without any

feedback or on the basis of highly selective feedback through exams or the comments of a handful of interested students. In the Program Seminar, one monitors weekly and over long-term periods the impact of lectures and assignments through the responses of a large subset of students with differing interests and abilities. How this happens will be apparent when the third of FLC's structural innovations is described.

THE MASTER LEARNER AND MUMFORD FELLOW

The two structural reforms just described address squarely the problem of the atomized curriculum and the privatized character of academic experience. Several things were yet to be addressed for a positive thrust toward the building of community. First, it was foreseen that the centrifugal pressures within the lives of the teachers and students would prove stronger than the structural imposition of a federated curriculum and the Program Seminar. Second, the problem of the mismatched educational expectations of faculty and undergraduates was not yet addressed. And third, nothing was yet provided in the way of support and guidance for students to utilize freedom intelligently in a pluralistic setting. These remaining problems were addressed by the creation of a new type of teaching professional, the Master Learner and the Mumford Fellow.

Who and what are the Master Learners? The Master Learners are faculty members at Stony Brook who have earned the respect of the faculty as both scholars and teachers and who have earned that same respect from students. They are "masters" in the sense that they have mastered at least one discipline and subject matter and in the sense that they have over time won the respect of both students and colleagues as better-than-average teachers. The Mumford Fellows are graduate students who are well along in pursuit of a doctorate in a discipline different from that of the Master Learner and who show unusual promise as teachers. Depending on previous experience and readiness, the Mumford Fellow comes in time to share collegially all the tasks of the Master Learner enumerated below. The diverse disciplinary background, pedagogical skills, intellectual resources and personalities of the Master Learner and the Mumford Fellow interact differently with the faculty and

students of different programs to make impossible rigid definitions of their respective responsibilities. What is said below of Master Learners is true of the collegial team of Master Learner and Mumford Fellow.⁹

The Master Learners are called learners because their chief task is to become students again in a thematic area in which they, at the outset, possess no expertise. Although their academic resources and ages prevent them from fully returning to the role of student, they engage in all of the activities of undergraduate students. The Master Learners actually take the six federated courses and the Core Course in the same manner as the program's students do. They are in class every day, they take notes, they take exams, do term papers (yes, usually at the last minute), and are graded. While engaged in the role of full-time student, the Master Learners are relieved from all their normal teaching duties. The only teaching they do during this period is in the aforementioned Program Seminar. Obviously, since the Master Learners are learning from the same sources and at the same time as the students in the Program Seminar, the "teaching" of the Program Seminar cannot be of the sort appropriate to the disciplinary classroom wherein they are acknowledged masters.

The role of the Master Learners is exceedingly complex and ambiguous. While they are essentially community builders, for the purposes of this essay it will be useful to distinguish five different dimensions of their role.

1. The Master Learners are interpreters or mediators. They explain the expectations of students to the faculty and the expectations of faculty to the students. The Master Learners, more importantly, assist faculty and students in seeing values in those expectations that might otherwise not be perceived. Understandably, some students and some faculty often see the Master Learners in partisan terms. The students expect an advocate or ombudsman; the faculty expects an unquestioned reinforcement of its objectives. Although in time the experience of again being students influenced the Master Learners of the first five programs significantly to modify their own teaching styles and goals, such partisanship or preconception at the outset of a program would make the Master Learners incapable of functioning as mediators.

2. The Master Learners are participant observers or diagnosticians of the educational process. As a function of being in the classroom every day and interacting frequently with forty students over a twelve- to eighteen-month association, the Master Learners are in a unique and enviable position to report what works and what does not work. The first three Master Learners, for example, all agreed that the assignments given to Stony Brook undergraduates constituted an educationally dysfunctional workload. In order to survive, students had to devise criteria for the significance of presented material and assignments other than the ones animating the courses.

3. On the basis of this daily and long-term observation, the Master Learners function as feedback mechanisms to the faculty regarding the effectiveness of their teaching. The feedback, it should be stressed, is not "merely" collegial feedback. Nor is it "merely" a more detailed version of a student evaluation. On the basis of their extraordinary knowledge of the program's students, the Master Learners are able to differentiate responses. A spontaneous teaching style, for example, engages one sort of good student but leaves another sort of good student confused and disappointed. Further, Master Learners know how intelligent particular students are, what effort has been invested, and the difficulties of students who for one reason or another invest little effort in the course.

The particular means of feedback employed by each Master Learner has varied. Many times direct feedback has resulted in a redoing of a lecture, a modification of an exam, or a change in the course material. On at least two occasions, early intervention averted serious pedagogical errors. Some Master Learners have attempted week-to-week feedback sessions. Regardless of the variety, each faculty participant receives at the end of the semester a lengthy and detailed report containing commentary and evaluation of a quantity and quality not likely to be matched in the rest of that person's teaching career.

4. The Master Learners are community builders and the embodied resistances to the centrifugal pressure in the lives of faculty and students. Aside from the aforementioned mediation of the diverse expectations of faculty and students, the Master Learners also are intellectual mediators. Learning the language of the diverse

disciplines they are studying, they circulate a weekly report to the faculty. They grope toward a "dejargonized" common language and assist the faculty at seeing connections amid their work. At the Program Seminar, the Master Learners likewise forge a language intelligible to the multidisciplinary participants, and they place students with similar interests in touch with each other. Finally, on the basis of superior knowledge of the interests of the federated faculty and of the university, Master Learners assist the program's students in locating faculty resources in support of their developing interests.

5. The Master Learners are role models for the students. To greater and lesser degrees, they embody all the values of the university: love of learning, the process of inquiry, and the importance of discipline; and more particularly a host of assumed habits unfamiliar to our students, like an empirical orientation to the reading of newspapers and relating them to coursework.

Outside evaluations describe the impact of the Master Learners on students in terms of their being "good authority figures." A parental or judgmental role remains, but the situation of shared experience, or, as some would say, "shared suffering," creates uncommon pedagogical opportunities. The students' awareness of intellectual strengths and weaknesses and of personal focus seems to grow by leaps and bounds in interaction with this trusted figure. And to some extent, varying with program and personnel, that authority is transferrable to the federated teachers.¹⁰

THE CORE COURSE

The fourth structural innovation in FLC is an inadequately titled "Core Course." The Core Course, team-taught by all six federated faculty, is the place wherein the most sustained attention is given both to the theme of the program and to the nature and interrelationship of the federated disciplines. The Core Course meets once a month for three hours over a three-semester span.

The faculty initiate and attempt to exemplify the process of interdisciplinary inquiry in the Core Course. At the start of the third FLC program in "Technology, Values, and Society," the topic of "Rock Music" was chosen, and the federated faculty led the discussion by means of leading questions from each of their disciplines. The sociologist spoke of the structure of power in the

music industry; the philosopher, of different patterns of sound in classical and rock music; the literary person, of the cultural significance of rock festivals. In similar sessions, the students are thus led away from the fundamental misconception engendered by the atomized curriculum, that is, that disciplines differ only by subject matter.

Perpetuating such faculty-initiated and -dominated inquiry over the three semesters, however, could have defeated an essential purpose of the Core Course. From the start, it was recognized and intended that student exposure to the study of a single theme in light of six disciplines would *over time* create an opportunity for a changed relationship with individual faculty, who would be still fairly well locked into the perspective of one or two disciplines. The Core Course is the locus of the changing faculty/student relationship because it is the place where the weaknesses of specialized inquiry and the strengths of multidisciplinary inquiry are most visible and where the experiences of students, or at least good students, place them at some advantage over the faculty. Put in less adversarial terms, the Core Course offers the opportunity for a dialog between disciplinary and interdisciplinary paradigms with the students, better than the faculty, representing the strength of interdisciplinary inquiry. The students thus become resources for the further education of the faculty. Over time, they, more or less smoothly, assume responsibility for teaching the Core Course with considerable assistance from the Master Learners and the federated faculty.

The pedagogic *goal* of the Core Course is quite clear: the passage of FLC students from passive learners in poorly understood disciplinary courses of an atomized curriculum to active learners utilizing and presenting disciplinary resources in interdisciplinary inquiries that they themselves conduct. That goal, as will be admitted and explored presently, is difficult to attain; the value of the goal, it will be argued in the next section, justifies the effort to attain it.¹¹

The FLC Experience

Coherence is a property of the interrelationship between individual focus and the courses of the curriculum. In the general

education movement, emphasis is on the courses as the source of coherence, that is, through a combination of courses that address the range of human experience or of Western heritage. In Empire State College and in many adult-centered learning programs, the emphasis is properly on individually generated focus. FLC is philosophically midway between these two approaches. It recognizes that most eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old students lack the experience and the opportunity to generate the personal focus and hence the curricular coherence possible for adult learners. FLC creates such opportunities for focused coherence by opening up engaging space within the curriculum in which students become active and cooperative learners in the academic/social communities built on top of that shared curricular experience.

In order to understand how this cluster of curricular innovations functions as the infrastructure of academic community, let us follow some students through the experience of the total FLC environment during an idealized time period. Forty FLC students are enrolled in an engineering course in contemporary technology, a history of technology course, and a philosophy of technology course. The forty FLC students comprise a subset of total enrollment in these three courses that ranges from eighty to 400 students. One day in the engineering class, the professor attacks the myth of the "technological fix" and makes the startling claim that technology has never solved a social problem without creating negative side effects. The non-FLC students dutifully record the professor's claim and file it with other notes to be reread at exam time. Four FLC students, majors from biochemistry, literature, philosophy, and sociology, discuss the claim as they walk toward their history course. In the history course, again with all forty students present, one of the FLC students asks the history professor's opinion. The professor refers to chapters in their assigned text wherein counterclaims might be found. Later in the day, the professor of philosophy also is consulted, and he suggests that the concept of "solution" be examined before the claim can be considered. During the lunch break, several students meet with the Master Learner and the Mumford Fellow. The automobile is discussed as a possible contradiction to the professor's claim and dismissed because of its pollution. The airplane is dismissed because of its energy consumption and its military application.

Suggestions come rapidly but are shot down by one or another member. Musical and medical technology, for example, electric guitars or eyeglasses, seem like promising examples. The Master Learner suggests that at the next Program Seminar the engineer's claim be discussed in light of the other two courses. Each person is to come prepared with two examples, one that makes the engineer's claim seem strongest and one that makes it seem weakest. In the intervening days, students try out examples on their friends and teachers. At the Program Seminar, the Master Learner leads a brief plenary session examining the engineer's claims to be sure that all are aware of its meaning. Then the seminar breaks into four groups, and each student tests the refined examples he or she has brought. According to plan, the groups report back to a plenary session, where the most promising examples from each group are discussed. For some, the claim seems strained with respect to developments like eyeglasses, but to others, the claim is now seen as a shorthand way of reminding ourselves that there will always be side effects of any technological development.

A computer science major drops in to see the Master Learner. She confesses that she is having difficulty keeping up with the reading in the history course. The Master Learner reveals a similar difficulty that he and other students are having and promises to talk to the professor. In the meantime, he shares his own method of sorting out the most important passages. Conversation turns to her major and its relationship to the insights of their philosophy course. She decides that she would like to do her Program Seminar paper on the history of the computer in education with special attention to its influences on society and on human self-esteem.

In a campus pub, four FLC students are relaxing after a long day of classes. Two are commuter students who report that before FLC their highest priority was to get off campus the minute classes were over. The conversation switches back and forth between a party they are planning and an upcoming Core Course meeting for which they have responsibility. The topic of nuclear energy, a front-page preoccupation at the moment, comes up. A physics major in the group, well informed on the subject, defends the risk involved as preferable to the known alternative. He rejects some naive assumptions of the theater major about solar energy. The sociology

major challenges him on the basis of their history course. He cites the maldistribution of the benefits involved. A literature major, not previously concerned with the issue, is asked his opinion and hesitatingly formulates some questions that no one can answer. As the bartender calls for the last round, they agree to consult with the faculty about some disputed facts and to talk with the Mumford Fellow about making energy a topic of a future Core Course. Conversation returns to the upcoming party as the bartender shoos them out the door.

As can be seen, the academic-social community created by FLC's curricular structures brings all the diverse components of a learning situation—students, professors, and their courses—into vital, engaging relationships. The superior vitality of the FLC experience, I imagine, would not be contested by many. Past experience with interdisciplinary and processively oriented programs, however, would lead many to wonder if academic quality were not being sacrificed for vitality. A brief consideration of these legitimate concerns will conclude this section of the essay. FLC in its structure is somewhat immune from criticisms of typical interdisciplinary programs because the programs and credit structures are solidly based on six, already existing disciplinary courses. And when successful, FLC communicates the message to students that disciplines have important and irreplaceable strengths not offset by their weaknesses in areas requiring interdisciplinary inquiry.

But FLC also is obviously interdisciplinary and process oriented, most importantly in its Program Seminars and Core Courses. How can the academic quality of these enterprises be defended? These are legitimate concerns worth exploring.

Let us postpone temporarily the question of process-oriented learning and concentrate first on interdisciplinary inquiry. At the outset, it can be conceded that, if interdisciplinary activities are measured by the same standard of excellence as is appropriate to a discipline-based traditional course, the interdisciplinary activity would be found inferior. Students in a course on "The Greek Mind" cannot develop the understanding or the appropriate sense of sophistication that would be generated in separate courses on Greek philosophy, Greek drama, Greek art, Greek history, and so forth. Professors of such interdisciplinary courses cannot help but

suffer in their capacity to keep up with and understand the latest research in all these fields. To repeat: judged by departmental standards, the courses cannot help but be thought inferior and the students, poorly trained.

The standards of the departments, however, are two-edged swords. If one allows what I think is scarcely deniable, that is, that the disciplines themselves have different standards of excellence, the problem becomes more complex. Some, to be sure, will defend a single standard of excellence and will say, for example, that however much we might employ or enjoy the insights of literature and art, the bottom line is the objective or behaviorally measurable evidence collected by social scientists. When the novelist or the philosopher objects to the imposition of an inappropriate standard and characterizes the social sciences as inhumane, then the problem of plural standards must be faced. Existing disciplinary standards, understandably, are either individualistic or the products of unheterogeneous communities. Not only for the sake of interdisciplinary inquiry but also to provide a legitimate intellectual foundation for assembling all the disciplines within a university, we need a meta-discipline, a mode of intellectual mediation appropriate to the various and conflicting disciplines and perspectives. Future ages, I believe, will be astonished that we were not concerned to develop one from the outset.

Even if this need were granted, however, as many will not do, the objection would be raised that the very notion of a standard of excellence for interdisciplinary inquiry makes no sense. Excellence cannot be achieved in interdisciplinary studies because no goal for the activity exists. Interdisciplinary activity is essentially "wishy-washy." A useful metaphor will reply to this forceful objection: a pianist or a cellist in solo performance is rightly judged by standards of excellence appropriate to a single instrument. In a symphonic performance, however, different criteria are relevant. The different criteria in no sense dilute the standards of musical excellence appropriate to solo performance, but they certainly demand additional skills, for example, the capacity to play responsively, and they may require a modification of interpretation and style (not to mention temperament).

From the standpoint of the disciplines, the recurring faults of

interdisciplinary studies are superficiality and lack of standards. From the standpoint of interdisciplinary studies, the recurring fault of disciplinary studies and a fortiori unfederated disciplinary studies, is mistaking a partial viewpoint for a more inclusive one. Whatever the disciplinary rigor, students are miseducated if they believe (say) that the benefits and drawbacks of the introduction of formula feeding in the Third World are to be understood solely with reference to the effect on the labor force. Interdisciplinary excellence is judged both in terms of movement toward more inclusive understanding in terms of the awareness of specifiable complexities of interacting variables. One criterion of the existence of such a movement is the transformations of disciplinary understandings of given situations.

Let it be granted that there are standards of excellence appropriate to interdisciplinary inquiry. That might conceivably justify some kind of interdisciplinary course, but what would justify the learner-led Program Seminar or the team-taught Core Course? Here indeed additional justification is required. As admitted before, end-products would undoubtedly be of a more scholarly sort if appropriately skilled faculty conducted and controlled the inquiry from beginning to end. Four considerations outweigh this theoretical point, however. One is the aforementioned fundamental value of assisting young people to move from passive and purposeless students to focused and self-initiating learners with knowledge of and respect for the disciplinary resources of the university. That value is surely worth some small three- to six-credit space in the 120-credit curriculum of our colleges. Second, just as disciplinary standards are inappropriate to interdisciplinary inquiries, product-focused standards are inappropriate to those that are process-focused. The Program Seminar and the Core Course immerse students in the activity of thinking rather than in the results of lengthy thought processes. In the metaphor of my colleague Lawrence Slobodkin, the Program Seminar and the Core Course are "the kitchen of the intellect." As students are miseducated to identify partial viewpoints with inclusive ones, so too they are miseducated (and often repulsed) if they never participate in or witness ideas taking shape. The kitchen is filled with unwashed pots and dirty water and unused scallion tops as the Program Seminar

and the Core Course are filled with false starts, detours, dead ends, and conflicts. As one who knows nothing of the kitchen and sees only the beautifully garnished roast at the candlelit table is ignorant, so too is the one who lives in abstraction from the process that leads to fruitful hypotheses, insights, and variable hypotheses. Third, there is no more reason to say that criteria of excellence cannot be specified for process-oriented inquiries than for interdisciplinary inquiries. Directions in the first Program Seminar informed students: "Your grade in the Program Seminar is a measure of your use of the learning opportunities presented to all of us through the federated courses, the Program Seminar, the Core Course and the comparatively intensive feedback provided to you. . . . Our focus is the process of learning, not the conclusions." Fourth, and perhaps most controversially, the faculty is not now in a position to teach courses on World Hunger or on Technology, Values, and Society in the breadth of the perspectives incorporated in an FLC program. Nor is it likely to be for some time, given the resistance to this type of learning described in the concluding section of this essay. Perhaps some day the faculty, or at least the Master Learners and Mumford Fellows, will be. But for the time being, the utilization of students in a sequence of federated courses as resources for the education of faculty and students is an alternative with considerable positive side effects.

It is obvious, I hope, despite the strong defense of the academic legitimacy of FLC-like education, that the entire university is not being urged to restructure in the shape of FLC. FLC, to be sure, implicates the present devitalized structure of the present curriculum. As said before, FLC attempts to insert a transitional, microcosmic experience in the curriculum to enable students to move toward an understanding and appreciation of the academic and social utility of the university.

All students, to be sure, do not need an FLC-like experience. But some of the goals of FLC might frame the character of generally educated persons. Such persons have mastered one discipline and understand its strengths and weaknesses, most particularly the partiality of its viewpoint. They have moved from passivity to active moral commitment in a relativistic world. They have immersed themselves in a communal, interdisciplinary study of one

problem of social magnitude and have learned thereby the value—indeed the necessity—of seeking many and diverse perspectives. They have developed skills in understanding and in integrating these diverse perspectives. They have mastered the systems of access to these perspectives. They will themselves be able to conduct with their fellows and to contribute their own expertise to subsequent social issues as the need arises in their lives. Tolerance of ambiguity, empathic understanding, awareness of one's own partiality, openness to growth through dialog in plural communities—all these things have become part of their instinctive responses to each novel situation they encounter.

Resistance

At this writing, FLC is finishing its sixth program and is recycling two of its early programs. The resistance to novel ideas that characterized Stony Brook's initial responses to FLC—a long and painful story—has gradually softened: the presence of colleagues in one's classroom is now accepted; FLC has developed a base in Ammann College, one of the campus's many residential halls; programmatic spin-offs are occurring rapidly; and FLC faculty are being looked to for leadership in curricular and pedagogical matters. However, the gradual acceptance of FLC into the mainstream of Stony Brook activities has misled many outside observers (and many prospective participants) to underestimate the demands of an FLC program. The initial attractiveness, indeed the romantic appeal, of a community of scholars blinds many to the intellectual and psychological costs of participation. The closing pages of this essay will enumerate several of these costs.

1. Both students and faculty experience FLC as a fishbowl, as a near total environment. The benefits of anonymity, in other words, are lost. The students, merely because they are known by other students and by the faculty and a fortiori because their potential and ability are known, often feel subtly pressured to take assignments far more seriously than they might otherwise.

The faculty is under an equally demanding pressure. Two of their colleagues observe their teaching on good days and on bad. Those colleagues are monitoring the effectiveness of their teaching

through frequent interaction with "their" students. Practices and foibles of many years standing are suddenly subject to comparative scrutiny. And finally, the faculty must attempt to learn in the public situation of the Core Course with students, many of whom will surpass them in knowledge of several of the disciplinary perspectives of the program's thematic.

2. FLC is a high-feedback system. While almost everyone, students and faculty, professes to desire honest feedback concerning performance, it is probably truer to say that what they want is mostly positive feedback. A good deal of positive feedback does exist in an FLC community, concentrated more in student-student relations than anywhere else, but a good deal of unexpected negative feedback also exists. The negative feedback, for the most part, originates in the diversity of the FLC community.

3. Students consistently single out that diversity as the community's major educational asset. But the faculty, for a host of reasons, reacts very differently. The lived reality of attempting interdisciplinary dialog under current conditions often involves a jungle of private languages, conflicting paradigms, unshared ideologies, and endlessly questionable value judgments. When the unprepared explorers discover that reality, when they discover that even their own long-standing assumptions and value judgments about matters intellectual and pedagogical are publicly questioned, then all sorts of forces counterproductive to the creation of academic community can be let loose. The single most destructive force is what I call epistemological triage, the undermining of the creation of community by judgments (often not voiced) concerning the comparative worth of the disciplines in a program and in a university. Some disciplines (most often those in one's own division) are really worth studying; others are merely useful; and a third set is not worth serious study (nor worth retaining in any university in time of retrenchment).¹²

This triaging on the part of the faculty can occur as well with reference to negative feedback from students. Despite the legitimization of the feedback through the Master Learner's endorsement, the faculty still can dismiss that feedback and decide that only upper-division majors are able to assess the worth of their teaching. In the absence of a clear institutional message to the

contrary, one that would say that we must all learn to communicate better with wider audiences, the feedback will likely not be acted on.

4. FLC is a process-oriented community. Its programs are not able to deliver prepackaged understanding of the great issues they address. Many students cannot cope with the phenomenon of their teachers disagreeing or of a Core Course meeting that produces no "answer." Success for many students throughout their lives was gained by writing down the teacher's view and regurgitating it at the appointed time. Ingenious schemes will be devised to avoid making up one's own mind, for example, by deciding that for whatever reason only one professor can be unquestioningly believed. The nature of the community and of the problems being studied, however, will not easily tolerate such avoidance.

The faculty, too, for reasons discussed earlier, also resists the process. It is as comfortable as are the students with the more manageable analyses. It often judges the worth of the inquiry by familiar disciplinary standards and finds it seriously wanting.

In partial summary of the intellectual and psychological resistances of faculty and students to FLC, it might be observed that the members do genuinely desire to escape the isolation of their privatized lives but that they expect the community that they join to respond to them on their terms. Despite extensive orientation, nothing in their previous experience has prepared them for life in a multiperspective, high-feedback, and open environment. As the new members' experience in FLC brings them to realize that the community has business other than praising their ideas or providing a warm refuge from an impersonal and unappreciative university, then real opportunities for growth are present.

While preferring to end on the hopeful notes, we would be misleading if those notes of hope drown out the critique of current practices embodied in the FLC experiment. The discontent of much of the student body, especially the eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds, did not disappear with the end of the Vietnam war. There is profound alienation with the role assigned to youth in our society, and the years in college are not experienced as an exception to or an oasis in an unresponsive adult-centered milieu. As unsuccessful and utopian as were many of the reforms in higher education in the late

1960s and early 1970s, they were at least responsive to the depths of alienation of so many of our young people. The same thing can be said about FLC: whatever the ultimate judgment on its success and on its contribution to higher education, its evolving structures at least address the psychologically dissatisfying and epistemologically inadequate means by which we in higher education currently attempt to initiate the young to our most treasured and fundamental values.

Notes

1. The first report of the Institutional Self-Study was called *Stony Brook in Transition* (Stony Brook, 1974). Written by a twenty-three-person Steering Committee chaired by Academic Vice-President Sidney Gelber, the entire Self-Study drew on the resources of over one hundred faculty, students, and administrators.

2. This was one of several follow-up reports to the Institutional Self-Study. Written by the author of the present essay, it drew on contributions from many other Stony Brook colleagues, notably, Bruce Bashford, Alice Bernstein, James Bess, Steve Cole, Ken Feldman, Sidney Gelber, Norman Goodman, Joseph Katz, Robert Marcus, Joan Moos, Frank Myers, Paul Newlin, Rhoda Selvin, John Thorpe, and Martin Timin.

3. The concept of mismatched expectations was first employed in a seminal way by R. D. Laing et al., in *Interpersonal Perception* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966). I elaborated the concept and applied it to higher education in my essay, "The Incomplete Revolution: A Reassessment of Recent Reforms in Higher Education," *Cross Currents*, 24, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 423-43. In those pages, the description of the mismatch of faculty and student expectations is more complete, especially with respect to the expectations of the faculty than is possible in the present study. And the findings of the Stony Brook study are placed in larger perspective, particularly with reference to the very different situation of adult learners.

4. The expectations for academic community, it will be recognized, as well as those for illumination of personal and social direction are quite continuous with, if not identical to, the values that were articulated in the student movement of the 1960s, that is, freedom, relevance, and participation. Together, these three values constituted at once a demand for the inclusion of the students in a face-to-face or participatory democratic community and at the same time a profound question of the legitimacy of the authority and the rules by which their lives were currently governed.

For a host of reasons, economic ones perhaps being primary, the educational vision of the student movement has few defenses in the 1970s and in the dawning 1980s. But the academic expectations of the new students have not changed greatly, despite the recognition of most about the current impracticality of the vision.

5. Four departments, namely, philosophy, history, literature, and political science, might reasonably be thought to be charged with addressing the central or shared dimensions of being human. In a study called "The Eclipse of Academic Community," we studied those four departments at Stony Brook, UCLA, Santa Barbara, and Stanford and found that the total number of undergraduate courses offered by these four departments averaged 447! Even if we were to eliminate the courses that these departments assign upper-level numbers as rough guidelines to the entering student, there were still staggering numbers of courses remaining. At Stony Brook, where the situation has changed remarkably in this regard since 1975, there were 282 different undergraduate courses at the freshman and sophomore level in those four departments.

The casual observer might feel that the departmental major provides a coherent course of study. However, many departmental majors require (and often only suggest) roughly fifteen or fewer courses that must be taken. And the fifteen courses are very often not *specified*, but left to the students' choice from among grouped courses. Further, the departmental major has a *professional* coherence that is synonymous with educational coherence only for the minority who are bound for graduate school. Finally, regardless of its coherence or incoherence, departmental majors provide direction for roughly one quarter of the students' choices, time, and energy.

6. As a function of this reduction, students expect that what is educationally significant will effect an immediate, positive reaction or, in their language, a "turn-on." They do not feel, as they would not feel in sampling the unusual taste of artichokes for the first time or in being introduced to someone else's idiosyncratic friend, that it behooves them to work at it until they find out why something that does not impress them is highly regarded by others. Significance, in the atomistic university, in other words, is a function only of what can be interpersonally generated. Hence, the importance that student evaluations of teaching place on the *enthusiasm* of the teacher. The crisis of teaching in higher education is thus similar to the collapse of family life in America (where the problem is termed "nuclearization"). In both cases, larger social systems in which the unit operates provide little sustenance and external support from which a meeting can draw strength and meaning.

7. See John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1927); Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), and *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: MacMillan, 1965); and John McDermott *The Culture of Experience* (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

8. Faculty in FLC programs have become increasingly less shy about the alleged privacy of their colleagues' classrooms. The first group relied exclusively on circulated notes to keep informed of their colleagues' lectures. The second group began rotating visits. And the third, in an incident described above, several times got drawn into debate with a colleague.

9. The persons filling the Master Learner role have been Patrick Hill (philosophy), Charles Hoffman (economics), Marshall Spector (philosophy), Arnold Strassenburg (physics), and Marjorie Miller (philosophy). The Mumford Fellows have been Jennifer Randisi (English), Steven Olsen, (English), and Thomas Thorp (philosophy). Three persons, Susan Bordo (philosophy), Lynne Mitchnick (sociology), and Juliet Papadakos (English), have served in both roles.

10. The new roles of Master Learner and Mumford Fellow, perhaps for reasons of more obvious novelty, have attracted more attention than the cluster of structural innovations that together constitute the FLC program. While the Master Learner and the Mumford Fellow are undeniably the central figures in an FLC program, the abstraction of the roles from the total curricular environment or infrastructure of FLC badly misinterprets the program and belittles philosophically the role of shared experience. Without the creation of the conditions wherein shared experience is possible, the Master Learner and Mumford Fellow could not operate. And their roles would be reduced to that of gimmicks.

11. A fifth structural innovation, not particularly germane to the focus of this anthology, is a "cycle of differentiated responsibilities." All of the activities of participating faculty (other than the Master Learner and Mumford Fellow) are undertaken as overloads by the faculty. In the semester following completion of a program, the faculty is given a reduced course load to compensate for their overload involvement in FLC.

12. The term "triage" was first widely used by medical personnel in military situations. Given their limited resources, they immediately divided the wounded into three categories: (1) those who would likely recover with little or no care; (2) those who would likely die even with extensive care; and (3) those for whom medical assistance might produce significant results.