THE MEANING OF GENERAL EDUCATION

The Emergence of a Curriculum Paradigm

Gary E. Miller

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This book is dedicated to Karen and Gregory

The author gratefully acknowledges the advice, support, inspiration, and friendship of Dr. Hans Flexner

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Foreword

For the college and university faculty member, the academic administrator, the student of higher education—for anyone concerned with and about the improvement of the postsecondary curriculum—this volume provides an uncommonly penetrating and illuminating treatment. While it offers a much-needed historical and conceptual analysis of general education in the United States, it provides a good deal more than that. Much of the discussion surrounding the curriculum in past years has been focused on content rather than on the conceptual and theoretical foundations from which curricular alternatives and priorities are established and meaning and consistency in practice are derived.

Thus it is not surprising that the curriculum, notably but not solely at the undergraduate level, has been marked by confusion and inconsistencies, particularly over the past two decades. It is especially ironic that general education, which was originally formulated as a reaction to what were perceived to be the serious shortcomings of liberal education, should today be confused with the latter. Indeed, the two terms are often used interchangeably, despite the fact that the two forms of education have fundamental conceptual differences that lead in turn to important practical differences. The assumptions that underlie the curriculum and practice of liberal education grew out of the late nineteenth century liberal culture movement in the university, with its emphasis on the separate disciplines that have long served as the administrative and organizational basis of the university and as the structural foundation of its curriculum. General education, on the other hand, which was generated in the 1920s and 1930s solely as a curricular movement, is founded on pragmatic and contextual premises. It is interdisciplinary in character, as are the human problems and concerns that provide the basis of its curriculum.

Essentially, the liberal education perspective looks to the past for a sense of direction, for a pattern of meaning. Those who advocate excellence via a return to the glories of the past have in fact just

this perspective in mind. Knowledge, historically viewed as a priori and universal, becomes an end in itself in this scheme; the curriculum is merely a vehicle for the acquisition of knowledge, most commonly in disciplinary segments. In the general education view, on the other hand, knowledge is hypothetical and should be regarded as a means to a desirable end: a fuller, more abundant personal life and a richer, freer society. To achieve that goal, knowledge from various sources, past and present, is utilized as and when it is needed, often in the solution of human problems. Indeed, general education is fundamental to the quality of life in a democratic society and has, in fact, been conceived in that context.

In spite of these and other important distinctions between liberal and general education—and the quite different curricular choices and educational practices these distinctions imply—it has become common practice to attempt to combine in a single program or curriculum the goals and objectives of the one with the means and procedures of the other. But since the underlying assumptions of the two are not only different but frequently incompatible, the resultant mix is more often than not dysfunctional.

These current trends need very much to be corrected, and in offering this splendid analysis of general education in the United States, including its important and potentially vital relationship to forms of professional, continuing, and adult education, Dr. Miller has provided an invaluable service to all those concerned with curriculum formulation and construction in higher education. Since general education increasingly has come to serve as the foundation of higher education in colleges and universities throughout the country, this book should be warmly received by members of curriculum committees, faculty, higher education administrators, and higher education professionals everywhere.

Comprehensive in scope and scholarly in interpretation, this exceptionally insightful and instructive book is also remarkably readable. In addition to offering a serious and penetrating analysis of the roots and sources of general education, it provides a conceptual framework, a nexus of assumptions for analyzing and revising the higher education curriculum, that will be welcomed by the increasing number of individuals interested in and concerned with educational reform. It is the most important book on the meaning and development of the concept and practice of general education available, and with its publication Dr. Miller and Teachers College Press have made a major contribution to the improvement of the quality of American higher education.

Hans Flexner

THE MEANING OF GENERAL EDUCATION

The Emergence of a Curriculum Paradigm

CHAPTER 1

Transformation and the Search for Meaning

American higher education is going through a period of massive change. Depending on one's perspective, it is a time of exhilarating innovation or of crippling crisis, a time of challenge or of collapse. It is certainly a time of self-examination, self-criticism, and reassessment of some of the basic assumptions and organizing principles on which higher education is established.

The change (and the prospect of even more change) in higher education reflects what may be a fundamental change in the broader society with which our colleges and universities are inextricably intertwined. In times of social transformation, it becomes almost unnecessary to be reminded of just how flawed is the myth of the ivory tower and of how much the mission of higher education is defined by the needs of society. In an age of stability, the ivory tower protects and conserves the basic assumptions and principles that form the bedrock of society. But what are the assumptions and principles that must be upheld by higher education in an age of transformation, an age when, to use Toffler's (1970) phrase, we have seen the death of permanence?

The Industrial Revolution, itself less than two centuries old, has already given way to the Technological Revolution, whose tide has moved much faster than our institutions' abilities to adapt. We find ourselves playing a game whose economic, political, and social rules no one knows quite how to teach. Like the Industrial Revolution before it, the Technological Revolution involves a paradigm shift. It is not just the technology that is changing; it is the intricate fabric of society, the collection and organization of shared assumptions and principles that are the common stock of thought and action in daily life, that are only too quickly being transformed.

The current confusion of purpose and program in higher education reflects a search for meaning within this new paradigm. The

depth of the problem is stated eloquently in the 1986 report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching:

> The undergraduate college, the very heart of higher learning, is a troubled institution. . . . [Educators] are confused about how to impart shared values on which the vitality of both higher education and society depend. The disciplines have fragmented themselves into smaller and smaller pieces and undergraduates find it difficult to see patterns in their courses and to relate what they learn to life. . . . Colleges appear to be searching for meaning in a world where diversity, not commonality, is the guiding vision. [p. 16]

What the Carnegie Foundation found, says its report, was "on most campuses a disturbing gap between the college and the larger world" (p. 17). The gap reveals itself in almost every facet of academic life: increased reports of faculty stress, concern that university researchers are being outdistanced by the private sector, a scramble for new students in the wake of a much-ballyhooed drop in the traditional student population, demands by business and industry for tailored programs, and an unexpected, though much belated, new respect for continuing education among faculty and administrators alike.

The National Commission on the Role and Future of State Colleges and Universities (1986) warns of "a storm brewing" in public higher education: "The storm warnings are unmistakable: our society is troubled, our economy endangered, our democratic values jeopardized, our educational system embattled" (p. 29). Among the warning signs noted by the commission are an increase in the high-school dropout rate, a decade-long decline in minority students as a percentage of the total college population, growing adult illiteracy, a growing "underclass" of children who live in poverty, cutbacks in remedial programs, increased college costs, shortages of teachers, and poor understanding by college students of international issues.

These and other concerns have caused many educators to ask if the curriculum has become irrelevant for a generation of students facing a rapidly changing, increasingly dangerous and complex world. Thus it is not surprising that it is in the curriculum—especially in the undergraduate curriculum—where the issues underlying the call for reform all come together. It is also only natural that so-called general education would come to be seen as a catalyst for innovation as colleges and universities try to deal with these changes. For many, general education is the conscience of higher

education, the part of a university that is concerned most directly with the individual student's responsibility to society at large. Many, including the authors of the key commission reports of the 1980s, have called for a reexamination of general education.

Indeed, serious discussion of general education should be an urgent item on the higher education agenda; however, it has been hampered by a pervasive sense of confusion over the meaning of the term *general education*. Thus we hear advocacy of one particular subject area or another, such as advocacy of international education as a component of general education or of computer literacy as a component of general education or of science and mathematics as components of general education. Advocates see the issue from the narrow perspective of their own disciplines and thus see the solution within the same context. How the parts might fit together into an integrated, comprehensive curriculum is rarely discussed.

Part of the problem for those who seek to cultivate general education is the lack of a definition that (1) is widely accepted (even within the academic community of a particular college or university) and (2) is specific enough to have more than rhetorical value as the basis for establishing the content and methodology of a curriculum and to provide a basis for evaluation. For the past century or more, higher education has moved steadily away from an ability to reach agreement on such issues. Faculty—the final determiners of any curriculum—have become firmly rooted in the research ethos, thanks in large part to the reward system that colleges and universities have created. The emphasis on research has bred a vast array of academic specialties and fostered the professionalization of the curriculum at all levels. In this environment, faculty members are given neither means nor encouragement to communicate effectively across disciplines in order to find innovative answers to new instructional problems. As a result, while there is much serious, concerned talk about general education, each person brings to the discussion a definition of the term that is colored by his or her own perception of purpose. Agreement about general education objectives reached in conference dissipates in the classroom; the vagueness of the term *general education* almost inevitably results in teachers succumbing to the temptation to focus on specialized, professionally oriented, discipline-ordered knowledge.

What does *general education* mean in this environment? Active definitions cover a wide spectrum. At one end is Arthur Levine's (1978) simple statement that general education is "the breadth component of the undergraduate curriculum" (p. 3). This definition is

most notable for what it leaves out. It suggests no goals for general education other than "breadth" and confines it to the undergraduate curriculum. It is simply instruction that leaves a person generally educated but sets no other goals. Such a general education might have no relationship to the remainder of a student's academic career or to the student's daily life.

But there are other definitions along the spectrum that testify to a more specific role for general education within the totality of postsecondary education. One example is an eight-objective approach summarized by Algo Henderson and Jean Glidden Henderson (1974) that "attempts to analyze the functions of [humanity] in life today and the aspects of knowledge that should facilitate the performance of those functions" (p. 33). A variation on this theme is struck by Earl J. McGrath (1974), who writes that general education is "the thread that ought to weave a pattern of meaning into the total learning experience" (p. 2). McGrath defines general education as "that which prepares students for the common life of their times and kind, regardless of their calling; including that fund of knowledge and belief and those habits of language and thought which characterize and stabilize a social group. It is the unifying element of a culture" (p. 2).

Clearly, it is *possible* to make a distinction between the goal of being "generally educated" and that of receiving a "general education" that has specific objectives. Still, confusion remains over what, specifically, distinguishes a general education curriculum from other curricula. Here, the question becomes not only one of goals but one of means—the content and method of the curriculum which are, in practice, what ultimately give reality to the goal. For instance, the term *general education* is often used interchangeably with *liberal education*. However, as later chapters will reveal, there are important differences between the two, which are revealed most clearly in the assumptions about content and method that one brings to the curriculum. The nature of these distinctions is central to this book, the thesis of which is that there is a fairly specific set of assumptions and organizing principles which, taken together, constitute the *paradigm* that defines general education. These assumptions and principles have been consciously developed since early in this century.

The first step in the search for the meaning of the term *general education* is to identify the origins of the general education paradigm. Halliburton (1977), borrowing from Thomas Kuhns, defined a paradigm as an intertwined collection and organization of assumptions that are shared by a group of people and which provide a basis for

thought and action among members of that group. If one understands the general education paradigm, then one can compare and evaluate specific curricula to see which fit into it and which do not. This is a basic activity to be undertaken if discussion of general education is to take on practical meaning.

A survey of higher education in the past century reveals that there is, indeed, a paradigm of general education that is fundamentally different from other conceptions of the curriculum. Like a river running through the terrain of higher education, our concept of general education has been fed by several sources, its course shaped by pressures of the times. Briefly, the general education paradigm can be described as follows:

> General education is a comprehensive, self-consciously developed and maintained program that develops in individual students the attitude of inquiry; the skills of problem solving; the individual and community values associated with a democratic society; and the knowledge needed to apply these attitudes, skills, and values so that the students may maintain the learning process over a lifetime and function as self-fulfilled individuals and as full participants in a society committed to change through democratic processes. As such, it is marked by its comprehensive scope, by its emphasis on specific and real problems and issues of immediate concern to students and society, by its concern with the needs of the future, and by the application of democratic principles in the methods and procedures of education as well as the goals of education.

The idea of general education has been evolving for almost a century. It started as a reform movement following World War I. Today, however, one must seriously consider whether the goal can be reformation or, given the scope of change facing higher education, whether there must be transformation into a new context for discussing educational goals and methods. The nature of that context can be glimpsed by a comparison. The Carnegie Foundation report (1986) notes that "a balance must be struck between two powerful traditions—*individuality* and *community*" (p. 18). But there is another way to look at the question of balance. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Marilyn Ferguson (1980) argues, "The person and society are yoked, like mind and body. Arguing which is more important is like debating whether oxygen or hydrogen is the more essential property of water" (p. 190). General education represents a continu-

ing effort to create a third option in the curriculum, one that recognizes and builds on this inseparable relationship between the individual and community. After almost a century of experiment and, often, of quiet failure, it offers a way of articulating a curriculum that can meet the challenges facing postindustrial society.

To understand this third option, we will look at the history of higher education, tracing how pressures inside and outside education helped shape the curriculum over the past two centuries and how these pressures led to the development of a specific general education paradigm. Many general education curricula have been tried over the years. Some have been radically different from the others. This book will focus less on their differences than on their commonality—the assumptions and organization of ideas that make these curricula *general* education rather than some other kind of education.

Throughout its development, the concept of general education has been especially sensitive to forces and events both inside and outside higher education. To understand how and why general education has evolved as it has, one must also understand these forces and how they shaped and were shaped by the curriculum. This book draws upon a variety of resources to put general education into a broader institutional and social context. It should be stressed, however, that, while it uses the work of many historians to put general education into perspective, this book is not a history in the strictest sense; instead, it is an attempt to reestablish an understanding of the meaning of general education as it applies to the challenges facing higher education today.

While general education is primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon, it is in some ways a continuing response to the experiences of the nineteenth century, which, to a large degree, still define the practice of higher education in the United States. The next chapter therefore focuses on the nineteenth century, to set the backdrop against which general education appeared.

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, general education grew around the contributions of two competing philosophies, which are outlined in chapters 3, 4, and 5. One is a humanist approach, articulated by Alexander Meiklejohn and others who inherited the anti-research, pro-aesthetic culture movement of the nineteenth century and redirected it to meet twentieth-century needs. The other is an instrumentalist philosophy associated with progressive education and with the work of John Dewey. The two philosophies made essential contributions to the general education

paradigm and set it apart from the classical ideal of liberal education advocated during the same period by Robert Maynard Hutchins.

Chapter 6 summarizes the definition of general education that evolved from the interplay of the humanist and instrumentalist approaches. By the beginning of World War II, the line separating general education and liberal education had been drawn. That line would become confused and in some cases lost in the decades after the war.

Chapter 7 is devoted to World War II and the Cold War, when higher education responded to a rapidly changing postwar society and to a concern with basic democratic processes, and chapter 8 to the 1960s and 1970s, when higher education adapted to an increasingly diverse—and volatile—society. The experiences of these periods illustrate how, within the basic themes of general education, the emphasis has shifted to meet the specific needs of a specific time and place. Both periods contributed to the common perceptions of general education and to the current confusion surrounding the term.

Finally, in chapter 9, current applications of general education are explored, some conclusions are drawn about the general education paradigm, and ideas are culled from the historical analysis for describing general education curricula.

This broad, integrative approach is the only way to tell the story of general education and to reveal its meaning as it has evolved over the century. The goal throughout is not simply to document what happened to general education in the twentieth century, but to gain insight into the meaning of general education that will guide curriculum planners today.

CHAPTER 2

The Classical Curriculum Confronts Democracy

When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote the account of his 1831 visit to the United States, one of his first observations was the unusual state of education in the young democracy. "I do not believe there is a country in the world," he wrote, "where, in proportion to the population, there are so few ignorant and at the same time so few learned individuals. Primary instruction is within the reach of everybody; superior instruction is scarcely obtained by any" (1840/1980, p. 51).

The observant Frenchman had captured an accurate image of higher education in ante-bellum America. What he could not know was that higher education was on the verge of a metamorphosis that would radically transform the role of colleges and universities in the nation. At the end of that metamorphosis, higher education would be almost as accessible as primary and secondary education, and yet there would remain some truth to the notion that, in America, there are few ignorant and few truly learned among the citizenry.

While Tocqueville could not have foreseen the changes that were about to occur in American education, he did observe and report on a basic fact of American society that would help fuel the engines of change:

> In America there are but few wealthy persons; nearly all Americans have to take a profession. Now, every profession requires an apprenticeship. The Americans can devote to general education only the early years of life. At fifteen, they enter upon their calling and thus their education generally ends at the age when ours begins. If it is continued beyond that point, it aims only toward a particular specialized and profitable purpose; one studies science as one takes up a business; and one takes up only those applications whose immediate practicality is recognized. [Tocqueville, 1840/1980, p. 51]

How American higher education would respond to the practical and professional educational needs of young people was already a controversy when Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s. It is a controversy that has continued into the latter decades of the twentieth century. At issue is the role that colleges and universities should play in preparing Americans for a profession or vocation. But also at issue is the responsibility of higher education to prepare Americans for all those other things that a democracy asks of its citizenry, such as voting and participation in the formulation of public policy, living as responsible members of a community, and, certainly not the least, pursuing individual happiness. A knowledge of how this controversy evolved and how colleges and universities responded to it is a key to understanding how and why general education emerged as a reform movement in the twentieth century.

Democratic Pressures on the Classical Curriculum

When the Puritans set out for their new world, they carried with them a belief in learning. An educated elite was necessary to the survival of a religious community whose entire structure was centered around the words in a book. Once arrived, however, they soon discovered the fear that their community might pass to "an illiterate ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust" (Hofstadter, 1961, p. 83). They founded Harvard College with the primary objective of insuring a literate ministry and an educated leadership who would preserve the religious purity of the Puritan community. It was an essentially *conservative* objective, the means to which was the classical curriculum of the medieval universities of Europe.

But the growing community soon found other uses for its college. As Boston and the other emerging colonial communities diversified, a growing class of merchants, traders, shippers, and other professionals began to send their children to college; their aim was not to train young men for the ministry, but to ready their sons—both socially and academically—for careers in business, law, and other secular pursuits. Increasingly, college came to be, in Phyllis Vine's phrase, "an institution which was best suited to inculcate virtue and promote social sponsorship among the privileged" (1976, p. 409). By early in the eighteenth century, graduates bound for the clergy were in a minority; by the end of the century, 80 percent of all graduates were going into other vocations (Hofstadter, 1961).

For almost two centuries, American colleges resisted—successfully for the most part—pressure to make the curriculum more responsive to the vocational and social aims of their students. But, early in the nineteenth century, the pressure became overwhelming in the face of two revolutions—the continuing aftershocks of the American Revolution, which gave ever-increasing power to the common people, and the Industrial Revolution, which was just beginning in the textile mills of New England and the iron furnaces of Pennsylvania. As Algo Henderson noted, the profound changes of the American Industrial Revolution began just "as the wave of democracy, spirited by Jefferson and brought to a crest during the Jacksonian period, swept over the nation" (1960, p. 3). Together, these two forces would re-form American higher education.

Thomas Jefferson had been looking for ways to apply his meritocratic view of democracy to higher education since the early days of the republic. Jefferson's view of education was based in the belief that "there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents" (quoted in Malone, 1981, p. 239). He asked his old friend and sometime adversary John Adams, "May we not even say that that government is the best which provides most effectually for a pure selection of these natural *aristoi* into the offices of government?" (p. 239). Toward that end, Jefferson had sponsored bills for "the general diffusion of knowledge" that would have provided free primary education for all and government support for the further education of young people of exceptional merit (Malone, 1981).

Jefferson's energies would focus on the creation of the University of Virginia. In 1818, Jefferson served on the Rockfish Gap Commission, which had been appointed by the state legislature to pick a site for the University of Virginia. Its report, which embodied many of Jefferson's ideas, laid out the following purposes for higher education: "To expound the principles and structure of government. . . . To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce. . . . To develop the reasoning faculties of our youth. . . . To enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences. . . . And generally to form them to habits of reflection and correct action" (Rockfish Gap Commission, 1818/1961, pp. 194–195). The university's original curriculum in 1824 centered around eight schools: ancient languages, modern languages, mathematics, natural philosophy, natural history, anatomy and medicine, moral philosophy, and law (Hofstadter & Smith, 1961). The range of courses reflected Jefferson's goal of training "natural *aristoi*" for professional and civic leadership. The availability of choice among eight programs

of study reflected Jefferson's faith in the virtues and talents of the individual. His insistence on the study of law and politics reflected his belief in the importance of an educated populace to the success of the republic. These two concerns were to remain important to American higher education; they would become central to general education in the next century.

The curriculum plan for the University of Virginia attracted the attention of educators throughout the South (Brubacher & Rudy, 1958), but Jefferson's program also influenced several northern educators. Most notable among these was George Ticknor, a Boston Brahmin who traveled to Europe armed with a letter of introduction from Jefferson (Malone, 1981). Ticknor became one of the first four Americans to receive a Ph.D. from a German university (Brubacher & Rudy, 1958). Profoundly influenced by the German system, he returned to Harvard, where, as a faculty member, he began to advocate a free elective system that would guarantee the student's freedom of study by doing away with prescribed courses. He also maintained a correspondence with Jefferson, informing him of developments at Harvard and at the German universities during the time Jefferson was designing the program for the University of Virginia (Malone, 1981).

While the combined influences of Jefferson's meritocratic approach to education and the German ideal of student freedom were shaping a more student-oriented, utilitarian curriculum philosophy at Virginia and Harvard, another kind of democratic spirit was spreading on the frontier. This spirit was embodied by Andrew Jackson, who became President of the United States in 1829. The ensuing 12 years, known as the Jacksonian era, had a lasting effect on the national consciousness. Before the Jacksonian period, democratic rhetoric tended to speak of Americans as "a sovereign people." The emphasis was on the national polity itself, and in this context colleges would comfortably justify their role in training an elite leadership for that polity. Jacksonians, on the other hand, talked about democracy in terms of "real people"—the planters, farmers, and mechanics on whom the Industrial Revolution and the settling of the frontier depended and who were fast becoming a force in national politics (Meyers, 1968).

The Jacksonian view of democracy was much different in spirit from that of Jefferson, but it, too, focused greater attention on the educational needs of the individual. This time, however, it was not the "natural *aristoi*" but the common person whose needs were in the forefront. This concern would shortly give rise to the land grant

movement and to a great surge in vocationalism in higher education. Ironically, Jacksonian democracy also stimulated some aspects of vocationalism for another, quite different, reason. Henderson notes that educators, alarmed by the extension of the vote to "illiterate workers, saw the solution in universal literacy. In turn, compulsory education created a need for teachers and teacher training institutions; along with this came public acceptance of its responsibility for meeting educational needs" (1960, p. 162). Beginning with the Jacksonian era, education at all levels began to lose its strictly conservative function as it was called upon to deal with the immediate needs of a fast-growing country (Brubacher & Rudy, 1958). The stage was set for a confrontation between two visions of education. One, the classical curriculum, looked to the past for enduring truths to guide students in the present. The other, still to be born, would look more to the present to find the tools needed to shape the future.

The Yale Report

The Yale Report of 1828, written four years after the University of Virginia opened its doors and in the same year that Andrew Jackson was elected President, stands as the most articulate defense of the classical curriculum against the pressures for curricular change. It challenged the basic social issues head on:

> It is said that the public demand that the doors should be thrown open to all; that education ought to be modified, and varied, to adapt to the exigencies of the country, and the prospects of different individuals, that the instruction given to those who are destined to be merchants, manufacturers, or agriculturists should have special reference to their prospective professional pursuits. [Yale University Faculty, 1829/1961, p. 285]

The Yale faculty accepted the assertion that "our republican form of government renders it highly important that great numbers should enjoy the advantages of a thorough education" (p. 287), but they emphasized "thorough" and defined a thorough education as being embodied in a prescribed curriculum that would provide for the "discipline and furniture of the mind" (p. 278). Specifically, the Yale Report called for these curriculum goals:

> Those branches of study should be prescribed . . . which are best calculated to teach the art of fixing the attention, directing the training of thought, analyzing a subject proposed for investigation; following, with accurate discrimination, the course of argument; balancing nicely the evidence presented to the judgment; awakening, elevating, and controlling the imagination; arranging, with skill, the treasures memory gathers; rousing and guiding the powers of genius. [p. 278]

The Yale faculty responded to demands that education address itself to the varied needs of individual students by offering a curriculum that gave the *same* education to *all* students. Yale did not deny the need for professional or vocational studies. Instead, its faculty argued, "our object is not to teach that which is peculiar to any one of the professions, but to lay the foundation which is common to them all" (p. 281).

In arguing for the classical curriculum, the Yale faculty was appealing to a different vision of American democracy—that of a homogeneous republic in which a common education would prepare all citizens (or at least the leadership) to respond to the requirements of citizenship. However, the wind would soon turn in the direction of diversity, the goal being to prepare many different people for many different walks of life. Increasingly as the century wore on, higher education would be called upon to prepare growing numbers of citizens for an increasingly greater variety of tasks in an industrial society. The relationship between higher education and the rest of American society was beginning to change.

The innovations of the 1820s did not catch on right away; neither the times nor the economy was right. However, the social pressures continued to build throughout the period leading to the Civil War. The effect of those pressures on the antebellum college can be seen most dramatically in two reports by President Francis Wayland of Brown University. In the first report, written in 1842, Wayland argued forcefully for the maintenance of curriculum standards. He recommended, for instance, that the college should admit only students who were candidates for degrees and that the number of students be limited so that "whatever is taught may be taught thoroughly" (Wayland, 1842/1961, p. 357). He also argued that other subjects should be added only if the degree program itself were expanded. These were arguments very much in the spirit of the Yale Report.

However, by 1850, Wayland was arguing for a much different approach. He now urged the Brown Corporation to "carefully survey the wants of the various classes of the community in our own vicinity, and adopt our courses of instruction, not for the benefit of

one class, but for the benefit of all classes" (Wayland, 1850/1961a, p. 478). Specifically, he urged Brown to eliminate a fixed term of study; to permit a student to choose as few or as many courses as he liked; to permit the student, within some limits, to "study what he chose, all that he chose, and nothing but what he chose" (p. 479); and to free students to decide for themselves whether or not to pursue a degree. "The object of the change," he wrote, "would be to adapt the institution to the wants not of a class, but of the whole community" (p. 480). Such a change, he argued, was not only expedient but necessary in light of his recognition that "a great and progressive change has taken place" (p. 484).

The change in Wayland's philosophy of education foreshadowed the profound and rapid changes in higher education that came in the aftermath of the Civil War. For the remainder of the century, the curriculum of higher education would be shaped and reshaped by two forces: the utilitarian movement and the influence of the German university, especially in the rise of a research ethos that would come to dominate academic life.

The Utilitarian Curriculum

By the time America emerged from the Civil War, it was well on its way to becoming an industrial power, with a growing urban population and a social environment that reflected its fascination with technology (Rudy, 1960). The rush to the western frontier had started an economic boom and fostered what Daniel Boorstin (1974) called a "go-getter" mentality. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., looked at the United States of 1868 and saw "the curious hardness of a material age" and "an incalculable force . . . precipitating upon us novel problems which demand immediate solution; banishing the old before the new is half matured to replace it" (quoted in Boorstin, 1974, p. 3). This era of great and rapid change and of stiff competition generated many new vocations and made many old ones more technical. Americans began to look to higher education to provide the training needed for young people to take advantage of the new age (Rudy, 1960). The pressure mounted for a curriculum that was more vocational, more diversified, and, ultimately, more utilitarian in its mission. A broader role for higher education in society was developing.

It was against this background that Charles Eliot assumed the presidency of Harvard in 1869. In his inaugural address, Eliot redefined the role of college instruction:

> With good methods we may confidently hope to give young men of twenty to twenty-five an accurate general knowledge of all the main subjects of human interest, beside a minute and thorough knowledge of one subject which each may select as his principal occupation in life. . . . For unless a general acquaintance with the many branches of knowledge, good so far as it goes, be attainable by great numbers of men, there can be no such thing as an intelligent public opinion; and in the modern world the intelligence of public opinion is the one indispensible condition of social progress. [1869/1978, p. 563]

The "good method" that Eliot had in mind was the free elective system, which his uncle, George Ticknor, had advocated a generation before. The goal of the system was to allow individual students to define their own courses of study, with the advice of faculty, thus giving students the opportunity to prepare themselves freely for a place of their own choosing in life. This was revolutionary in an educational community still dedicated to the prescribed curriculum, but, Eliot argued, "This lack of faith in the prophecy of a natural bent and in the value of a discipline concentrated on a single object, amounts to a national danger" (1869/1978, p. 567). The elective system would allow individual students to discover and develop their "natural bent" through a free choice of courses. Eliot was, in many ways, a Jeffersonian meritocrat; the key element in his curriculum philosophy was individual students' freedom to choose their own paths and to develop along the lines of their own strengths and merits. For this individual freedom, Eliot was willing to set aside the old idea of a closely knit collegial community (Veysey, 1965).

It is important to note, however, that the purpose of the curriculum was not simply to feed the students' self-interest. The ultimate objective of the elective system, as Eliot stated it, was to insure "an intelligent public opinion," that "indispensible condition of social progress." This combination of individual and social goals was right in step with the mood of the times. Spurred on by the westward movement, the recent advances in technology, and, not the least, the revelations of Charles Darwin, the United States was having a love affair with progress. Eliot proposed to put the curriculum into the service of society and, moreover, into the service of the idea of progress, while recognizing that, in a democratic society, the individual was the key to progress. In this sense, Eliot was one of the first pioneers in what Laurence Veysey called "the utilitarian university" (1965, p. 113), an institution that was accessible to large numbers of

students and which, among other aims, encouraged vocational specialization.

As the example of Francis Wayland will attest, the idea of social utility as the rationale for a university curriculum was not new. Wayland had been slightly ahead of his time, but during the Civil War the idea began to catch on. Probably the single greatest stimulant was the Morrill Act of 1852, which provided a funding mechanism by which states could create at least one college designed to "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits in life" (quoted in Levine, 1978, p. 558). One of the early successes of this movement was Cornell University, where the mission was "to fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufacturies, for the investigation of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor" (Ezra Cornell, 1869/1978, p. 560). Cornell President Andrew White led a revolution as far-sweeping as the one Eliot started with the elective system. He built a curriculum based in divisions and departments. A division of special sciences and arts offered nine departmental programs in agriculture, mechanical arts, civil engineering, commerce and trade, mining, medicine, law, education, and public service. A second division of science, literature, and the arts offered five general courses of study that did not lead to a vocation (Rudolph, 1977).

The idea of a curriculum geared to social utility saw its fullest expression at the University of Wisconsin toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century. Here, not only was the curriculum oriented toward the vocations, but the university encouraged its faculty to serve as experts for state government and operated a statewide extension program to insure the university's utility to all of the people of Wisconsin (Veysey, 1965).

The combination of a more diversified curriculum—accomplished either through free election or through a departmental structure—with a mission to serve society had a far-reaching effect on higher education. For one thing, it encouraged greater emphasis on professional education and greater specialization; faculty expanded the scope and, eventually, the number of professional programs by creating specialized courses in new areas. It also fostered graduate instruction: business at Harvard, medicine at Johns Hopkins, pharmacy at Cornell. The emergence of the graduate school put undergraduate instruction into a new context. Graduate-oriented faculty began to design undergraduate programs whose main purpose was to prepare students for graduate school; undergraduate instruction tended to become preprofessional instruction. Finally, the utilitarian university's emphasis on social expertise encouraged research into the new social sciences, creating a fertile field for a second wave of influence from the German universities. Along the way, the university movement began to create some new attitudes within education: the idea, for instance, that a college or university could be a progressive force for change in society rather than a preserver of traditions. This, in turn, encouraged a view of the student not simply as an individual in the classical liberal education view, but as a member of a community who would, upon leaving school, assume a specific role in society.

The utility movement began with a missionary zeal; however, with its great success, it lost much of its enthusiasm for reform. The concept gradually became merged with the research mission and with purely administrative, rather than instructional, initiatives (Veysey, 1965). The utilitarian reform movement had established an ongoing public service mission for higher education, but it also had contributed to the fragmentation of the curriculum, a problem that would be complicated further by the overwhelming influence that research would have on higher education.

Research, Culture, and the Emerging Curricular Crisis

Hand in hand with the growing popularity of the free elective system came a force of unexpected power: scientific research. By the turn of the century, the research ethos would totally dominate university life in the United States.

Research and the elective system had much in common. Both were imports from Germany, although the idea of research underwent change in translation. Both encouraged increased specialization of knowledge. Both benefitted from a departmental organization. But there were striking differences, as well. Where the elective system was designed to give students more freedom of choice in instruction, research was concerned more with the freedom of faculty. Where the elective system was clearly oriented to the vocational needs of society, research tended to be distant from the immediate needs of the community. Despite the differences, the two concepts coexisted rather nicely and in some ways fed each other; however, this was more by accident than by design.

The American concept of academic research grew out of the experiences of a second generation of American students who had

gone to study in Germany. There they discovered *Wissenschaft*, the German ideal that true understanding is achieved through scholarly research and inquiry. In Germany, *Wissenschaft* was permeated with the Hegelian philosophy of idealism; there was a spiritual quality associated with the search for truth and enlightenment through scholarship. The German concept was also tied closely to the teaching function of the university. "Working in the vineyard of knowledge side by side with his master, the student learned the method of his discipline and undertook his own investigations," wrote Metzger (1961, p. 99) of the spirit of the time, adding, "The joining of teaching and research gave the four-part German university a distinctive purpose and character" (p. 99).

But American scholars brought back only a partial understanding of *Wissenschaft*. They placed emphasis on scientific proof and on the search for certainty rather than on the kind of transcendental understanding that was the original goal of *Wissenschaft*. Gradually, the spirit of inquiry became associated with the search for an objective, measurable reality and the unearthing of scientifically certifiable fact. The American researcher also placed a high value on the intellect as a reliable instrument of investigation. These factors all led to an ever-increasing specialization in research—and ultimately in teaching—and to the celebration of the intellect for its own sake (Veysey, 1965).

Initially, the research ethos warred with the concept of a utilitarian university. While utilitarian educators fought to increase enrollments and thus serve increasingly larger numbers of students, research-minded faculty complained that the universities were already overcrowded. Research faculty welcomed the elective system for the freedom it gave them to explore new specialty areas, but they saw teaching simply as a means of reaching research goals, not as an end in itself. In fact, the research ethos would lead faculty away from the teaching function; spending time with immature and often mediocre students could be seen as a waste of time for someone who saw investigation as the primary aim of a university (Veysey, 1965).

The research ideal included an element of service to society via the generation of new knowledge and insights, but it was contrary to the general concept of service as it had been defined and practiced by the utilitarians. While faculty at utilitarian institutions like the University of Wisconsin offered their expertise in service to the state government, the research ethic would have no faculty member speak outside of his area of specialization. Pure research, noted Metzger (1961), fostered a decided neutrality as an aspect of academic freedom, along with a suspicion of popular sentiment. The research movement was an essentially ascetic, inward-looking movement.

Ultimately, pure research became a profession unto itself. The graduate school became another professional school that specialized in the training of new academic researchers in a wide array of specialized fields. The concept of utility was kept alive by those other professional schools—agriculture, engineering, and education, for instance—that received their research inspiration from the social problems to which their professions were directed and that received their funding from social institutions (Metzger, 1961).

The effect of the research ethos on the curriculum was overwhelming. On the positive side, the German influence that had brought research into higher education also helped create higher standards of instruction, along with new methods such as the laboratory, the seminar, and the lecture (Veysey, 1965). But in many other ways, the research ethos turned universities away from teaching. The growth of specialized departments contributed to the fragmentation of the curriculum and to increasing competition among the various disciplines (Rudolph, 1977). Perhaps most important to the curriculum, research-oriented faculty took a *laissez-faire* attitude toward students (Rudolph, 1977), with the result that the students were forced to take charge of campus life through the extracurriculum. The students created a campus environment in which the curriculum mattered little, if at all.

The growth of an institutional bureaucracy, the development of an inwardly directed intellectual purpose, and the professionalization of the faculty all contributed to a university that was insensitive to the human needs and "natural bent" of all but the best students (Rudolph, 1977).

The Culture Movement

In the late nineteenth century, a small but vocal band of counterrevolutionaries arose on campus carrying the banners of "culture" and "liberal culture." These faculty were opposed to the materialistic vocationalism and to the social scientists who had come to dominate the utility movement. They also were opposed to the narrow intellectualism they felt had become associated with scientific research. They offered themselves as an alternative. As one English instructor wrote in 1897, education was becoming divided into two parties, "the party of those who seek fact, and the party of

those who seek inspiration through fact" (Veysey, 1965, p. 181). This was to be the crucial difference between culture and research; in seeking inspiration, the advocates of culture were taking an idealistic, emotional, and essentially anti-intellectual stance.

The culture movement grew and flourished in the smaller liberal arts colleges and in some of the larger universities along the eastern seaboard, where the tradition of the classical curriculum still had a foothold (Veysey, 1965). It was strongest in departments of modern languages, English literature, philosophy, and the arts—in short, in those areas of academia where research and utility had not yet been able to establish a power base (Rudolph, 1977). The culture movement tended to be concerned most with aesthetics, ethics, and a response to art that drew upon an intellectual framework that was more spiritual and emotional than it was logical or scientific. While the scientific researchers were setting standards for gathering facts, the culturists were reconfirming canons of literary and artistic taste and appreciation.

In many ways, the culture movement reflected the mood of the times. It was, after all, the *fin de siècle*. The American painter James MacNeil Whistler was in England making his reputation and preparing the artistic world for the modernists, while fellow aesthete Oscar Wilde was touring the mining towns of the American West, bringing aesthetic sensibility to audiences who could hardly be expected to know what they were getting. But the late nineteenth century was also a Victorian society, with a strict moral code. If the culture movement provided students with an emotional release, it also gave them a strong moral training, even if it had to be at the expense of aesthetic feeling (Veysey, 1965). Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard expressed this moral side of the culture movement when he wrote, "It is the final result of intellectual culture in the development of breadth, serenity, and solidity of mind, and in the attainment of that complete self-possession which finds expression in character" (Veysey, 1965, p. 186).

The aesthetic and moral aspects of the culture movement were accompanied by a social code, for, in the end, the culture movement was *really* directed toward the civilization of well-bred young men. As Veysey (1965) reports, a "cultured" gentlemen was one "'whose manners are the natural doings of a free character.' He was someone willing to 'accept trusts,' even when personally disadvantageous. He would subordinate his own desires 'to a social code' and do so of his own will" (p. 190).

Unlike the utilitarians, the advocates of culture did not identify themselves with a Jacksonian view of democracy. Unlike the researchers, they did not see themselves as ascetics removed from the general run of society. Instead, the culturists set about to transform what they saw as a boorish society; their tools were idealism, the development of aesthetic appreciation, and, above all, the study of humanity rather than the study of nature.

At first, the aesthetic sensibility of the culturists was at odds with the empirical intellectualism of the research scientists. But over time, the culturists came to believe that appreciation of literature, art, music, or philosophy could be enhanced through careful and considered analysis not unlike that of science. As Hans Flexner (1979) noted, "The intellect gradually became associated with liberal culture itself, to the point at which the basic aim of the liberal arts faculty was precisely to elevate intelligence above all else" (p. 109). With this, the culture movement faded. As faculty turned to more and more specialized areas of intellectual investigation, the unity of the liberal arts curriculum collapsed, liberal arts faculty became professionalized, and the liberal arts became subjects of specialized research and professional training.

The culture movement has been described as a secular reincarnation of the mental-discipline philosophy that had dominated the classical curriculum. As Frederick Rudolph (1977) noted, the culturists "discovered that the old values, the enduring questions, the challenges to judgment and morality, inhered in the new subjects quite as readily as they had in the old ones" (p. 188). While they were based in the modern languages, literature, and philosophy, some culture faculty advocated a return to the study of ancient Greece and of Greek and Latin languages, and celebrated the absolute values that were held to be fixed in the classics. Moreover, the culturists maintained that the humanistic thought of ancient Greece had a peculiar relevance to students in the beginning of the twentieth century (Veysey, 1965).

The culturists and the classicists also shared a common view of the *structure* of the curriculum. The culturists were very concerned with the unity of study. This focus was in part a reaction against the popularity of the elective system and the proliferation of specialized areas of research-based knowledge. This led to an active support for a prescribed curriculum. The culturists argued that the goal of creating a cultivated mind was incompatible with free elective choice and vocationalism (Veysey, 1965).