

Chapter 1: PRECURSORS

[There was almost a Hampshire College in western Massachusetts in colonial times. This article was summarized in the 1970 Hampshire College Catalog, and may have been one of the reasons for choosing Hampshire as the name of the college.]

The Proposed College in Hampshire County in 1762, by Henry Lefavour.

Hampshire County had originally included all the province of Massachusetts Bay west of Worcester County, but in 1761 Berkshire County was set off, leaving Hampshire County to include all the present river counties of Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden. Worcester County was still relatively unsettled, and the journey to Boston was long and difficult, so that Hampshire was almost a distinct province...

The newcomers were either the less successful or the more enterprising of the Pilgrim and Puritan peoples of the older settlements; both alike brought with them the devotion to education that had characterized the early settlers of the colony. Not only did they see the need of the common schools, but they appreciated that there must be facilities for the training of their ministers and their civil leaders. The common schools they had, but the colleges were very far off. Harvard and Yale had their doors open, and a number of Hampshire boys had attended each and had graduated; but the journey to Cambridge or New Haven was long and expensive. The college fees were none too low, and country boys received no adequate social recognition either from their fellow students or in the college catalogue. Moreover, it was believed that the moral standards of the colleges were at a low ebb. Many unfavorable stories were told, and they lost nothing in the telling...(p. 53)

It is no wonder that the Hampshire people craved a college of their own which should maintain a proper standard of morals and be free from any contamination of the students' religious beliefs. If at the same time it should be more conveniently situated and less expensive, it would be all the more desirable. Hence when, in 1761, the Reverend Jonathan Ashley of Deerfield conceived the idea that the residuary bequest in the will of Ephraim Williams of Stockbridge might be used as a nucleus for the foundation of a Hampshire college, his scheme immediately won general support...(p. 54-55)

A committee of seventy-four interested citizens was formed to promote the project. The committee held several meetings, the last of which occurred early in January, 1762, at the house of Israel Williams in Hatfield. Apparently there was no doubt about the availability of the Ephraim Williams bequest, for Israel Williams said in a later letter that "the funds are already in our hands." It is possible that additional individual

contributions had been made or promised. The question for consideration was the mode of securing a charter. A royal charter from the Governor, acting in the King's name, had been prepared and had been thought to be the proper course...(p. 58) The committee appointed to meet the Governor reported that the Governor said he would take under consideration the [Harvard Board of] Overseers' request that the charter be not granted. The committee appointed to draw up a statement of their objections submitted their report, which was largely formulated by the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew. It was a lengthy document containing twenty-four arguments. The substance of the remonstrance can, however, be briefly stated. Harvard College had been founded by the government, and its powers and privileges had been confirmed by the province charter. It was not proper, therefore, for the government to lessen these privileges. Furthermore, a second college was not needed, and if it were established, it would compete with Harvard College in respect to both students, gifts, and bequests. The result would be two weak colleges, each unable to maintain the education that was needed for the preparation of civil servants and ministers...In closing, the Overseers urged the Governor not to issue the charter and not to facilitate an application elsewhere for such a charter...(p. 64)

What should be said of Governor Bernard in his relation to this controversy? He undoubtedly wished the institution to be established. He would have been its royal visitor, and it would have been a memorial of his devotion to the cause of higher learning...He was a politician, and like all politicians, was inclined to accept a compromise and yield to the stronger interests, although in this case his share in the exchange of values seems rather insignificant. The applause of the eastern communities as well as Harvard College certainly had great weight in comparison with that of the farmers on the frontier...(p. 69)

The Hampshire petitioners, as well as the Harvard College faction, had their hopes of securing favorable action in England. Their last concerted effort was an attempt late in 1762 to obtain the assistance of General Sir Jeffry Amherst...who might have undertaken the mission except for the fact that he did not desire to have any quarrel with the Massachusetts government which would cloud his reputation in England...(p. 69) This is the last trace of the movement...(p. 73)

[The Committee for New College, appointed by the Presidents of the other four colleges in 1958, created the original plan for what was to become Hampshire College. Excerpted here are three studies done by the Committee.]

The New College Plan: a proposal for a major departure in higher education. Prepared at the request of the Presidents of Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts. Committee for New College, 1958.

Foreword

The attached report recommends the establishment of a new college in our area, to be sponsored by our four institutions--a coeducational, residential college, initially of about a thousand students, at which major new departures in liberal education can be initiated.

We were asked to re-think the assumptions underlying education in the liberal arts and to re-evaluate accepted practices and techniques, in order to draw up plans for a college which would provide "education of the highest quality at a minimum cost per student and with as small a faculty relative to the student body as new methods of instruction and new administrative procedures can make possible." A grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education enabled us to work intensively for five months and to enlist suggestions and criticisms from a variety of consultants.

The most important contribution a college can make to its students is to develop in them a capacity to continue their education throughout their lives. We have become convinced that there are several new departures which could make an important contribution to the evolution of the American liberal arts college in response to the demands and opportunities of our period. The changes we propose reflect widespread opinion in the academic world, but it is not now possible to introduce most of them, on a decisive scale, in existing institutions. They can best be tested and demonstrated by making a fresh start: a new style of college, located among our established institutions, could both profit from their sponsorship and contribute, in its turn, to their development.

It is a widely-held conviction among liberal arts faculties that our system of courses and credits has got out of hand, and that our students are capable of far more independence than they exercise in present college programs. We propose a college which frees both students and faculty from the system which make education a matter of giving and taking courses to cover subjects.

At New College, subjects will be covered, not by providing complete programs of courses, but by training the student to master recognized fields of knowledge. A systematic and sustained effort will be made to train students to educate themselves. As freshmen, they will start with seminars especially designed as the first step, not the last, in independence. Other devices, such as student-led seminars associated with all lecture courses, will follow to reinforce this initial experience. Throughout, the program will provide for a type of social interaction which will create a climate favorable to intellectual activities.

Students will study only three courses at a time, an arrangement making possible concentration of effort and high levels of achievement. The faculty, on their side, will give only one lecture course at any given time; the rest of their energies will be devoted to the several kinds of seminars which characterize the curriculum. The student's program will be built upon a large freedom of choice among areas of learning, and will be tested impersonally, by field examinations set according to recognized professional standards, frequently with the participation of outside examiners.

The College's total offering of lecture courses will be small. But it will be supplemented by other kinds of study and testing. It will also be supplemented to some degree by the collateral use of the course offerings of the sponsoring institutions. And there will be, each year, a month-long midwinter term after the Christmas vacation, during which the whole College will join in studying two courses which will provide a common intellectual experience. One will deal with a subject of central importance in Western culture, the other with a subject in a non-Western culture, the subject changing each year over a four-year span. Visiting teachers from other institutions and from outside the teaching profession will play a large part in these midwinter courses.

The changes proposed will lead to significant economies in dollars and, more important, in the number of teachers required: we calculate that the New College plan, by giving up the attempt at a complete course offering (impossible for a college in any case), will make it possible for a faculty of fifty to give a first-rate education to a thousand undergraduates. This ratio of one-to-twenty will go with efficient sizes of classes: relatively large groups in lectures and small groups in seminars. But the proposal has not been arrived at by cutting the curriculum to fit economic considerations; on the contrary, educational motives have been paramount throughout our planning. Because the economies are motivated in this positive way, it seems to us that they can actually be carried out.

We should add that the several innovations we propose for New College, including in the extracurricular area the elimination of fraternities and intercollegiate athletics in favor of more spontaneous forms of student recreation, are changes that would reinforce each other, so that a style of life should emerge at the College which would

have its own momentum. This does not mean that we look to the establishment of a place which would appeal only to special "experimental" people, either as students or faculty. On the contrary, we are convinced that the time is ripe for a general shift in emphasis in first-rate liberal arts colleges, and that New College, working with a representative student body and faculty, could provide an example which would have wide influence.

This is a proposal for changes not in ends but in means. It affirms a belief in liberal arts education--that appropriate for a free man. Although New College aims at producing useful citizens, it rejects vocationalism and a narrow concentration on science divorced from humanism. The challenge of authoritarianism must not be met by a surrender of the principle that the supreme goal of an educational system is the free growth of the individual student and of the intellectual community.

If this report seems at times to be expressed with a confidence and a conviction warranted by a proven experiment, rather than an untried one, the authors may offer the compulsions of brevity as one reason for their forthright statements; but even more, they must confess the growth of their enthusiasm for the plan as they wrestled with its philosophy and translated convictions into proposals. We earnestly hope that the project will be found a wise one, and that the necessary support can be enlisted to make "New College" a reality. (p.3-5)

Cooperation with the Sponsoring Institutions

It will be a great advantage that New College can use some of the teaching resources of the four sponsoring institutions. When a subject which is missing from the New College course offering engages a student's serious interest, and cannot well be studied as an independent project, it will usually be available to him at one of the cooperating colleges. Students will be required to take at least one semester course away during their college career. The College can pay the costs to its neighbors of this enrichment of its program without incurring anything like the expense required to maintain separately the teachers and facilities involved. And it can afford to pay its full share of a cooperative transportation system. It will be unnecessary to support disciplines which are included when a college is conceived as a single, isolated entity. (p. 11)

Establishing and Sustaining the Pattern of Student Initiative

The independence which all good teachers want in their students cannot be created by an act of will on the part of the faculty. Too often, faculty members themselves discourage initiative by elaborating packaged tasks in an effort to be sure that the student learns all they think he should...The New College curriculum is designed to establish a pattern of independent behavior by intensive training in it at the outset and to reinforce the habit of initiative thereafter by continuing to provide situations which call for it...Breadth of knowledge is certainly essential; but really to know goes

with knowing how to know. Broad knowledge will not be pre-digested for New College students; it will come as a natural consequence of exploration, of "getting around" in their subjects...Methods are best introduced, not in the abstract, but in action. The fall freshman seminars will teach methodology by exploring limited subjects, each teacher deciding on a subject and its limits with a view to best showing a group of about thirteen students how he works, and how they can work, in using his discipline. (p. 16-17)

The Institution as a Community

The curriculum proposed could be adapted, we believe, to a variety of institutional settings. But its educational goals can be realized most fully if they are promoted all along the line: in the selection of students and faculty, in administrative arrangements, in working and living facilities, in plans for student activities and recreation. This does not mean recruiting a special "experimental" group of people and trying to create for them a unique, utopian community, so that an alchemy, impossible elsewhere, can take place. On the contrary, if what is new about New College is to have general significance, it should have a representative student body and faculty, comparable to other first-class institutions, working with representative resources. In many features the College will simply follow good current practice. (p. 29)

The Campus and its Architecture

The requirements for the New College campus are obvious, in the large, from what has been said already. The dominant, central building, visible if possible from afar, will be the library, with its associated study center, probably arranged as wings and commanding attractive views. Near the library, and connected, if possible, by covered walks, will be the laboratories and the auditorium and administration building. In one direction from this working area--presumably further uphill if the College is on a long slope--will be the student's living areas; in the other direction--downhill--will be the recreation center, with the amphitheater, the tennis courts, and the level playing fields. The dormitories will be grouped around their common rooms and dining halls; the latter must be near enough to each other so that a common kitchen can serve them. The site planning should provide space, if possible, for additional residential units (with separate kitchens if need be) and for space around the library so that its stacks and its study wings can grow outward and another laboratory can be added. Automobile traffic should circle the central living and working areas, not go through them. Land should be acquired to provide for doubling the athletic fields in the future. If possible, adjoining woodland should be purchased, or privileges obtained, so that trails for nature study can be developed and an accessible outing club cabin built.

The Committee favors a forthright modern architecture rather than a period style. The energetic, open-minded intellectual life which we hope for at New College could be expressed by adapting the style of building which is often used now by business and industry for laboratories and offices. One feature of business buildings which we

certainly should take over in study and recreation structures is the elimination, so far as may be, of interior bearing walls: it should always be possible to alter the arrangement of partitions as space requirements change over the years. Novel (and expensive) materials need not be used--beauty, meaning, and drama can be achieved by fine proportions of the large masses involved, and by disposing the living, working and recreation centers effectively in relation to each other and the terrain.

Maintenance should be considered at every point. No landscaping or planting that involves expensive maintenance should be undertaken; wide lawns can be inexpensive if keeping them mowed is all that is called for. The committee believes that there are several sites in the Valley where the terrain is such that a campus of beauty and distinction could be created without great expense, the sort of campus that would become identified for the community with the distinctive life led on it. (p. 43-44)

Student Reactions to Study Facilities, with implications for architects and college administrators. Committee for New College, 1960.

Large versus Small Study Rooms

The most significant finding of all is that for most students, use and approval of study space vary inversely with size. During the four days of recorded study, only 12 per cent of all the studying done took place in the large library reading rooms which exist on each campus; while 56 per cent of it occurred in the two smallest places: dormitory rooms and library carrels. In the opinionnaire, 80 per cent of the students declared these small study spaces were preferable to large; 85 per cent believed that it was desirable to study alone; and only 15 per cent of the students thought it desirable to study where there were 100 students or more. Places of intermediate size were also used and likewise preferred inversely according to their size. The informal comments are difficult to tally objectively and numerically, but they also clearly corroborate the preferences for small study spaces.

The reason for this strong bias against large study places is not mass agoraphobia but simply that distractions arising from other people prove to be the most serious frustrations to good studying, and these distractions increase in proportion to the number of people present. This was made clear by student comments and answers to the opinionnaire. Even under the best of study decorum, there will be more individuals coming and going in a large study hall, more rustling of papers, more coughing, more chair noises, more whispering, etc., etc. Under relaxed study conditions the noise may completely defeat attempts to study for many students. There are occasional students who prefer to study with this kind of noise, or even noise of greater volume and consistency. The vast majority of students, by their behavior and testimony, want as little of it as possible. (p. 9)

A Summary of Findings for the Use of Planners of Study Space

Students are good sources of information about study space, but they should be consulted in some numbers, because a single individual may not be typical.

There is a strong preference for studying in small places where one may study alone or with one or two others.

Good lighting is much wanted. Don't spare the wattage, and arrange it so that visibility is at a maximum, and eye strain at a minimum.

Heating complaints are mostly of too high temperatures in study halls, particularly in libraries...

Some social space should be provided in a dormitory so that those who wish to talk may do so without disturbing those who wish to study.

The few students who like to study in the clatter of public social places to the accompaniment of chatter, juke boxes, and food, can be trusted to find their own heart's desire without help from the college.

The dream of using empty classrooms and dining halls as study halls is probably a vain hope. Our data indicate that they will be used by only a few students.

Places to collect and use study materials are highly prized, and no doubt account in part for the popularity of carrels and dormitory rooms as study places.

Open carrels, arranged to reduce visibility, assigned to individuals but permissible to others when not in use, proved popular, especially when well lighted and under conditions of good temperature and ventilation.

Variety is needed in types of study space as well as in chairs. There is no place which will be used equally by all...

The more colleges tend to develop independence on the part of students and require greater amounts of individual research, the more need there will be for carrels or other small places for study. (p.40-42)

More Power To Them: a report of faculty and student experience in the encouragement of student initiative, by C.L. Barber. Committee for New College, 1962.

The Circumstances of the Project

The present widespread concern to encourage independent work by undergraduates reflects uneasiness about the effect of our standard system of courses and credits. This report will describe one among several current projects aimed at countering the tendency of our undergraduates to leave too much of the initiative in their education in the hands of their teachers. At Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts, in the academic year 1959-60, twelve faculty members tried out changes in their teaching procedures designed to promote student initiative and independence. The program was an outgrowth of the cooperative effort in planning a new style of college which in the previous year produced the New College Plan. Both projects were sponsored by the four neighboring institutions concerned, and both were supported by grants from the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation. (p. 5)

The Amateurism of the American Undergraduate, the Course System and the Problem of Initiative

It is our privilege, and our problem, when working with undergraduates, to address ourselves chiefly to people who, except about grades, have an amateur's disinterestedness. But we are pulled towards becoming salesman and/or taskmasters. At their best, our amateur public bestow their attention in an unforced, undutiful way while coming at their studies with their whole humanity; at their worst, they just cannot be bothered. And among individuals some of the best as well as the worst are apt to feel the pull of campus life--all that busy-ness which most students cannot ignore, even if they want to, because it is serious business, since College Life is preparation for Life after College...(p. 52)

The sort of students who arouse our concern here are not those who have taken over the initiative in their intellectual life despite the course system, but the students who are kept going by the course system, and at the same time limited by it. The intelligence and energy of the latter may be as high as any, and they constitute, at most colleges, the great majority of students. The very intensity of our efforts, in courses, to get the most out of them (or do the most for them) tends to take the initiative away from them. We talk at them, we draw them out, we assign readings, we contrive problems, we assign papers. ("There is not enough talk," wrote one of my students in his evaluation, "about the destructiveness of assigning papers.") This problem of the initiative is not one of abuses or stupidities, but of the whole drift of

the system...The whole problem is exacerbated by our use of marks for each course, and each task in a course, to enforce standards...(p. 53)

Able teachers have always encouraged independence in their students and sought to avoid emphasis on grades--by the way they present the knowns and unknowns of their subjects, by the questions they ask or do not answer, by the reading they suggest, the problems they assign for papers: Agassiz leaving his students alone for weeks with trays of bones is a fine old example. Exceptional students almost everywhere are excused from much course work, supported in projects. And our undergraduates, on their side, show remarkable integrity and autonomy, again and again, in coping with their situation on the receiving end of the course and grade system. They often take especially difficult courses, or courses for which they have limited aptitude, just to follow their interests. Just because they are amateurs, they have a refreshingly genuine quality of interest--and boredom; and because of their inner independence, they are often more original than the more advanced, professionally-minded student. But when this has been said, we must come back to the fact that the attitude produced in the average student by taking courses and getting marks tends to be passive. He does his jobs--the assigned jobs--almost like an industrial operative who leaves the planning and engineering of the whole process to somebody else--the faculty. The materials are provided, the tools put in his hands, and he does the job--fast...(p. 54)

Summary and Conclusions

Instructors found that more of their time, rather than less, was required, in some cases much more time; their judgment was that less time would be required to supervise similar independent work in subsequent years, but that there would never be a substantial saving of faculty time...(p. 55)