

Making of the College 2.0
[Version of May 10, 2006]

Anniversaries, especially round ones, are arbitrary points, but they can serve as significant moments of stocktaking and rearticulation. Hampshire College has just celebrated thirty-five years of educating students on campus; in 2006 we mark the fortieth anniversary of Franklin Patterson and Charles R. Longworth's *The Making of a College. A New Departure in Higher Education*;¹ and in two years we can commemorate a fiftieth anniversary, the appearance of "The New College Plan" itself.² As a classicist and student of Vergil, I cannot help but think: *Tantae molis erat...* -- "so great a task it was to found," in this case, our college.³

And not inappropriately, for Hampshire College neither was nor is just any college. The subtitle of "The New College Plan" runs "A Proposal for a Major Departure in Higher Education." Hampshire College was intended to be an experiment in post-secondary pedagogy, an alternative not only to the other four Pioneer Valley institutions that, since Hampshire's founding, constitute, along with Hampshire, the Five College Consortium, but also to the then standard modes of delivering a liberal arts education. It was to embody many ideals and goals of the liberal arts, to be sure, but to do so in new ways. Students were to craft, with faculty advisors, customized concentrations, pursuing courses of study they did not merely select but created. No off the shelf majors and lists of required courses. Hampshire did away not only with the major in its traditional form and course credits or "hours"; gone were letter grades and discipline-based departments altogether. Students and faculty alike were maximally freed to work creatively together, inventing topics and research programs, at every level, that were more often than not interdisciplinary in highly original ways.

Although Hampshire retains a perhaps surprising number of its founding features, it has never been static in its goals or modes of operation. Many are the revisions between the proposal of 1958 and the plan of 1966; by time the college actually came into being, hired its first faculty and admitted its first students in 1970, the pressures of reality had inspired further changes, and with each passing year, as students and teachers gave life to the theory of planning, the institution continued to evolve. Over time, three schools became four and ultimately five. Still recent in memory – and still controversial in some quarters -- is the revision of the Division I requirements. That controversy is good. All members of the Hampshire College community– students, faculty, administrators and alumni – continue to evaluate and debate the Div I reforms. How can we best prepare our students for the independent work that will be expected of them in Div II and, to an even greater degree, in their Division IIIs? What is the pedagogic and intellectual rationale for our current requirement that students take courses in each of Hampshire's five schools? This opens to even broader questions. What should the nature and role of courses at Hampshire in fact be? Are they ends in themselves, or means to an end (or multiple ends)?

Discussion about our curriculum and our pedagogy is not just healthy, it is essential and, not accidentally, of a piece with Hampshire's oft proclaimed identity as an "experimenting" college. Hampshire at its inception vaunted itself as a "major departure." If an institution departs from the standard model and thereby attains perfect

¹ Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1966.

² November 14, 1958.

³ *Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem, Aeneid* 1.33.

form, it would certainly be irrational and self-destructive for it to decline from its acme. Utopia, even if achieved, rarely remains utopic – some would say never; but even if it somehow did, it would have to face the inconvenient fact of history. The world is never not changing; change has been inexorable since – here I pick only Hampshire milestones – 1958, 1966, and 1970, and the pace and scale of change seems now to accelerate yearly. The challenges we face in 2006 and beyond are great. We need to orient ourselves to the present and future. I believe that Hampshire – by which I mean the entire College community, including, ultimately, the Board of Trustees – needs to have a broad discussion focused around one fundamental question: What kind of an education does Hampshire College want to stand for and want to offer in 2006, for today’s students in today’s world? This will be the core of Hampshire College’s mission.⁴ And given the fact that 2006 will quickly become 2007 (presumably *ad infinitum*), we would be wise to build into Hampshire’s workings, to the extent possible, mechanisms that incorporate ongoing self-assessment, evaluation, and updates.

One can expect that many elements of Hampshire’s traditionally student-oriented education⁵ will remain central to this vision. Would Hampshire still be Hampshire if it departed significantly from its basic premises and its basic insight, so simple and yet so brilliant, that students will do their best work and gain the most from their college years if they focus on what most deeply engages them?⁶ We have now thirty-five years of experience and wisdom to draw on in the realization of that vision, nor has the manner and mode of our delivering a Hampshire education stayed frozen over the intervening years. Rather, as I have noted, it has evolved, responding to a whole host of pressures, some more intrinsic, some more extrinsic. What we will want, I think, to do in our discussions is try to be both utopian in our vision, as if we, like the founders, had a bare slate before us on which we could imagine a dream college, and realistic, understanding that whatever we might in theory want, in fact, we depart towards that goal constrained in many ways, from very finite (if not quite exiguous) resources to the realities of our current physical plant. We are very much “in the midst,” and we face the challenge – and it is truly an exciting one – of trying to renew and reengage, in potentially radical ways, the spirit of experiment from within an ongoing experiment. In many ways, it is the challenge of history itself.

⁴ A mission statement proper will also include commitments to how Hampshire will, as an institution, operate, but as a college, our educational goals will be central and everything else will be supportive of that central goal.

⁵ I use the terms “student-centered” and “student-oriented education” in a sense that seems intuitive to me, namely, the way Hampshire looks to students to be responsible for defining their Divisions II and III, consulting with faculty along the way, of course, but being themselves the prime movers. I am aware that in the current literature these terms often refer to programs and pedagogical techniques that are less fundamental.

⁶ This is of course not the full story. Among the roles of the college as an educational institution, and of the faculty in particular, is teaching students what they need to know even to know what engages them, and helping them to deepen that interest not just in intensity but in profundity.

What is needed is vision. My musings here are not meant to supply a vision, for what is needed is a collective vision; only that will work in the long run and thereby leave a lasting imprint. Rather, in what follows I intend only to provide a starting point for dialogue. Of course, after as few as five months I have some fairly clear ideas. I hope that my sharing them will give impetus to broad discussions that will then lead to the articulation of Hampshire's mission as it needs to be in 2006. I see this not only as a plus – frankly, a necessity – for Hampshire College but for the nation, for I believe Hampshire has a national, even international role to play in higher education. From its foundation, Hampshire College has claimed to present and to represent a kind of higher education different from, and superior to, the standard form of higher education. I take it as axiomatic that Hampshire wants to continue to make this claim, and it is our duty, first, to assess in what ways we are fulfilling this high goal and in what ways we are not, and, then, to commit ourselves to strengthening the former and redressing the latter. Once we gain clarity as a community about our mission and prepare to follow through on any adjustments or realignments that newly clarified mission calls upon the institution to make,⁷ we must carry Hampshire's message vigorously to the world at large. We must enlist all of the Hampshire community, not only students, staff, faculty, and trustees, but alumni, parents, and friends, as spokespersons for the college. To that end, we must make sure they are fully informed and convinced of the coherence and compelling nature of our message and our ability to execute it. Only then can we expect the larger world to credit our claims for the continuing relevance and excellence of Hampshire's achievements.

Many action items follow from the above, too many, no doubt, to be carried out all at once, and yet too important simply to leave for another day. We must begin to improve our communications with alumni, parents and friends right away if we are to hope that in the not too distant future they will not only serve as key ambassadors for Hampshire but also increase their direct support. What better way to draw them in than to keep them abreast of and ideally involve them in the deliberations in which we will be engaging? We operate in the expectation that the new clarity about our mission for 2006 and beyond as well as our renewed confidence that we are embodying that mission will reap rewards for us in coming years on all fronts, from the recruitment of students to increased private philanthropy and foundation and industry funding. But we cannot wait until any and all revisions are in place to seek this support, for we are already engaged in an ambitious comprehensive campaign (with a goal of \$125M by 2010) and, more practically, we will want stepped-up levels of funding to permit us to realize whatever emerges as the college's aspirations. The more resources we have to work with, the more swiftly we can move towards our goals and the bolder our dreams can be.

This is a very heady time, and I mean to strike a tone of strong optimism. One must be an optimist, for if not, one must be a pessimist, and I am not simply speaking tautologically. I believe that Hampshire must succeed in retelling its story to the larger world in the next few years, reestablishing a strong reputation as the cutting-edge of up-to-date and even radical pedagogy. If not, I fear that it will not be able to sustain its forward motion for very long at all. Over the past five years, Hampshire College, under able administrators and the watchful eyes of its trustees, staunchly resisted the flow of red ink

⁷ In its fullest form, this would amount to nothing less than a new strategic plan. Whether or not we go so far, we will at least have the opportunity to restate for our own purposes our mission and purpose as part of the NEASC reaccreditation process we are already entering.

and returned the college to year-end-to-year-end viability. Thanks to strict controls, strong admissions, and increased generosity of supporters channeled into the Annual Fund, deficits were avoided. This involved, as such discipline always does even at the richest of institutions, difficult decisions. One cannot spend the same dollar twice, and one should always be clear about one's priorities. I do not think it unfair to say that given the constrained resources under which Hampshire operates – due ultimately largely to its sheer youth as an institution – these decisions were truly painful. Not only is our deferred maintenance budget alarming, we have not always been able to keep up with regular custodial maintenance to the degree we would like. Faculty and staff salaries are behind where we would ideally like to see them, so that it is painful to us all when we have to keep increases, or augmentations to benefits, within very tight limits.

These are concerns that need to be addressed, yet they do shake my basic optimistic outlook because I believe that Hampshire has a good chance of succeeding in winning increased support from its friends. I am all the more motivated to seek long-term solutions to Hampshire's straitened finances – in other words, endowed funds -- when I look out a few years. All but the very richest institutions have some cause for alarm. We are currently doing well in the competition to attract a strong class – if less well than we would like when it comes to diversity -- but the costs in financial aid dollars are rising rapidly,⁸ and demographers predict that the population of college-bound high-school leavers will in fact begin to contract in a few years. We currently give out roughly \$16M annually in financial aid. Our annual budgets are dependent on net tuition for 84% of our revenue. You can see how sensitive Hampshire is to challenges in that arena. How high can Hampshire tuition rise? Leaving apart from the calculation, at least for the present time, what would happen were there to be a severe national or global economic contraction – however likely it is: just let the housing bubble burst and see what that will do to home-owning Americans' perception of their expendable wealth -- there seems to be a significant shift in the amount of money even our full-pay students, or their parents, will dedicate to higher education. Many factors contribute to this. More and more middle-class parents are paying tuition for private schooling for their children at the elementary and secondary school levels. This is just another “need” that reduces the dollars potentially available to support us,⁹ and my experience “in the field” for Hampshire already has taught me that independent schools, between their tuition

⁸ It is a sign of the times that the *New York Times* ran as a front-page story on January 1, 2006, an article entitled “Aid Lets Smaller Colleges Ask, Why Pay for Ivy League Retail?”

⁹ There have been many observations on this, from a variety of perspectives. To cite only one recent article, Elizabeth Warren (“The Middle Class on the Precipice. Rising Financial Risks for American Families,” *Harvard Magazine* Jan-Feb, 2006, pp. 28-31, 89) argues that the money middle class families no longer seem to have “went to the basics. The real increases in family spending are for the items that make a family middle class and keep them safe (housing, health insurance), that educate their children (pre-school and college), and that let them earn a living (transportation, childcare, and taxes)” (p. 31, original emphasis). For an expanded version, reference is made to <http://privatizationofrisk.ssrc.org/Warren/> -- This is comforting, I suppose, but one can hardly ignore the fact that as a nation we are indulging ourselves in many things whose worth is dubious at best. What if all the money spent on elective surgery for purely vanity purposes were available for education, whether as tuition payments or philanthropy? Of course, those parents who are plastic surgeons have more money to spend on their children's education, but I rest my case. As a nation, we are making choices every day.

demands and their own capital campaigns, may currently be our most significant competitors for the philanthropy of donors we share.

For all these reasons, I believe it is imperative that we consider seriously the question whether Hampshire's current financial model is sustainable in the long run. I for one think it is not, but I believe that we have ample time to adjust if we start working at the problem now. We are currently in a relatively strong position, certainly for an institution that only started operation thirty-five years ago. Our position might appear enviable from the perspective of many a lesser college, but we have higher, not lesser institutions, as our aspirational peers. And prudence alone dictates that we operate on the premise of (potentially overly) pessimistic projections rather than be lulled by overly optimistic ones -- ants rather than grasshoppers, to wax Aesopic -- and take steps now to bring true long-term viability to our budgets.

Paradoxically, already in a year or two this approach may end up feeling much more liberating and "wealthful" than tightly disciplined and constrained. What is absolutely essential is that we identify and communicate more succinctly than ever Hampshire's profile and sharpen the edges of our excellence. We should be using those advantages rather than simply added dollars of financial aid, especially in the "merit" category, to attract and retain strong students.¹⁰ Focusing clearly on our stated mission and on excellence within that mission will help us prioritize the hiring of colleagues and our expansion and renovation of facilities. Above all, it will help us when we appeal for the increased private giving that must support us increasingly in the future.

This is not the place for a detailed outline of the final years of the current campaign, but it would appear that the Board of Trustees will continue to endorse, as the recent mid-campaign assessments by Marts & Lundy recommended, continued commitment to the initially projected goal of \$125M by 2010. I am adding as a second goal that our Annual Fund receipts reach the \$2M level over the same time frame, twice our current (outstanding) achievement. This is a tall order that will require not only more participation by our alumni but larger gifts across the board. It will be my job, with IA's support, to make the case for increased annual giving. At the same time, the balance of the campaign will focus to a large extent on giving in core areas with strong encouragement that that giving be directed to endowment, so that Hampshire can be permanently funded to achieve its total mission, academic, pedagogic, intellectual, and social.¹¹ At the risk of repetition, let me say that what will make this case most persuasive is a compelling description of what Hampshire is doing and what it intends to do, why, and how. Not to make this case, not to reach out and push the envelope of

¹⁰ We might, by the way, not necessary cut back on financial aid dollars; instead, we might be able to concentrate it more on need-based support, which is likely also to impact diversity positively. On the other hand, currently, not even 4% of our financial aid dollars go for merit- as opposed to need-based scholarships, so it is not as if we had a lot of money to shift. Obviously, these are complex matters requiring careful analysis, and I list this only as an example of one area one would might want to revisit.

¹¹ In the course of 2006, as we develop fuller materials for the next phase of the campaign, I expect that we will put out a specific goal for endowment giving by 2010. Marts & Lundy, looking beyond the end-date of the campaign, encouraged us to bring the endowment from its current level, approximately \$35M, to \$100M "within the decade," i.e., by 2016. A not implausible intermediate goal would be to bring endowment up to the level of the annual budget (now roughly \$60M).

personal philanthropy, and not to do so right now, will entail much greater risks. As I said to the faculty at its final meeting in calendar 2005, Hampshire was founded thirty-five years ago. Now it is time to fund it.

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The above has certainly been a lengthy prolegomenon to some ideas intended to spark a discussion on Hampshire's future directions, discussion that will contribute to the self-assessment portion of the NEASC reaccreditation process but that I expect will go far beyond any mandatory self-assessment. I wanted to give ample space to context setting. I anticipate that some of what I have been thinking will be provocative, while other items may prove provocative in ways I had not foreseen. I hope I need apologize for neither. There are no certain plans, no definite directions. It is only after community-wide discussion and ample dialogue and debate that a strong sense of direction, possibly even something approaching consensus, is likely to emerge. How we would operationalize whatever we claim we want to do will involve discussions of yet another order. Consider what follows on the order of a thought experiment.

What should an education at Hampshire stand for in 2006 and beyond? It is a large question, one that I do not believe could be answered even in a lengthy memo and one that shouldn't be answered by one person alone. Where even to begin? As I noted above, one of the core elements of Hampshire's pedagogy has always been the central role the student him- and herself plays in defining how the student's course of study should evolve. Faculty members play essential roles as well, but we look to the student to be responsible for seeking the advice he or she needs to fashion an academically robust and intellectually meaningful Division II. The same balance obtains when it comes to Division III, a "capstone experience" if ever there was one.¹²

The impact of Hampshire's student-centered pedagogy¹³ extends well beyond the student's own experiences. It characterizes one of the most interesting and unique features of "interdisciplinarity" at Hampshire, a mark of distinction all the more welcome to the degree that "interdisciplinary work" has become a well-nigh universal mantra. Certainly, our faculty are aware of and engaged in varieties of interdisciplinary work that they seek out as do so many faculty at institutions across the land; indeed, it is hard to imagine many of the more recently arrived faculty who didn't benefit from interdisciplinary connections during the years of their graduate study. But Hampshire adds the students into the mix as an additional impulse for cross-disciplinary and often cross-school connections. Faculty members are challenged to see whether hitherto unheard of and sometimes seemingly implausible combinations are going to be fruitful. Sometimes they say "no," and rightly so. But often they are willing to foster the experiment, and more often than not new and unexpected connections are established. This might be a praiseworthy state of affairs if the students' suggestions functioned solely as an aleatory generator of new combinations, but of course, it is anything but aleatory. The students are responding in part to Hampshire as they have already begun

¹² I have observed that Hampshire does not use the term "capstone" for Division III as other colleges do to refer to a senior essay or project, perhaps because it is thought that these other senior projects fall far short of describing the transformational quality we expect the Division III to have, and which, as I have learned, it truly does have in many cases. Nevertheless, it might be worth considering the use of the term in talking to prospective students, and if not, then certainly we should explain why not.

¹³ See above, n. 5.

to experience and dream it as well as to particular possibilities suggested by the courses they take as part of their Division I; above all, they are looking at the world through the fresh perspective of individuals who belong to the next generation.

This is surely not all that could be said in favor of a student-centered education, and in my mind, this is one core element that I cannot imagine a future Hampshire altering. The discussions now ongoing about Division I address a number of issues of what one might call “balance” between a firm commitment to student-centered pedagogy and a realization that its *reductio ad absurdum* would be a universe of independent self-learners. Interdisciplinarity, for all the slipperiness of that rather faddish term, does imply that there are “disciplines,” and even if Hampshire College is not arranged administratively into traditional discipline-based departments, and while each school combines multiple disciplinary perspectives, each faculty member (however much she or he practices across fields) represents mastery of one or more disciplines. Somehow, before the momentous point at which students devise their Division II programs, they have not only to be prepared to work, to a certain degree, independently, they have to have some basic acquaintance with the range of topics that could play a role in their college future. Obviously, there is a *reductio ad absurdum* limit to this argument as well, namely, that students would have to know everything already before they could decide what it is they want to combine and explore in greater depth. However unique its pedagogy, it seems likely that Hampshire, too, will not be able to escape devising some middle ground that guarantees that its students are confronted with a set of significantly disparate realms and approaches to give them a sufficiently broad base on which to construct their usually interdisciplinary Division IIs and Division IIIs.

Or perhaps not. Perhaps the College’s thinking about its form of pedagogy and its ideals for an undergraduate education in 2006 will lead us to jettison altogether the common model of “distribution requirements” and replace it with something else altogether, or with nothing. I want us to approach the task of self-rediscovery with maximally open minds, regarding nothing as sacrosanct by virtue of tradition. What I do hope and anticipate— indeed, I encourage it — is that our discussion will reach down to deeper structures and needs.

What do young people seventeen or eighteen and finishing high school need to do over the next four or so years? Fortunately, we do not have to answer the question quite so globally. Instead, we could rephrase it as follows: What educational experience do we at Hampshire wish annually to make available to roughly 400 high-school leavers (and a small number of transfer students) that (1) is valuable for them; (2) is valuable to all of us to the extent that it will shape for years to come the impact that this small but powerful group of leaders can have on society; and (3) we can provide better than any other institution of higher education?

To answer this question exhaustively, one might imagine combining a thorough analysis of the students who are emerging from our high schools today (either undertaking such an analysis ourselves or drawing on what appears to be abundant published literature on the subject) with a rich survey of the world into which they will come. These are certainly “givens” that need to be taken into account. In the temporary absence of such a thorough study, for the moment I would propose to simply work with a relatively small number of impressions both about students on the verge of college today and about more recent developments in our world to serve as a very rude scaffolding. Refinements can come later. And although I would very much like to see more international students in the Hampshire as soon as possible — and more international perspectives in the

Hampshire experience -- let us restrict our purview, as far as students go and for the purposes of this immediate exercise, to American students.

One cannot, of course, generalize even about American high-school leavers, perhaps more so now than ever. Some emerge very well prepared in traditional academic disciplines, with strong interpretive and communication skills (including expository writing), but many equally bright students are less well prepared. It is too early to know if the recently mandated "No Child Left Behind" program will do anything to improve the uniformity of preparation among college-bound seniors, but given the test-based approach to assessment, it seems reasonable to doubt whether this would have much impact on the kind of adventurous, intellectually curious, and self-motivated students that Hampshire has traditionally prided itself on recruiting and who have found Hampshire appealing. (It's also hard to imagine this changing.) Whatever their familiarity and comfort level with reading and writing texts, it is indisputable that students in 2006 and beyond, compared to students even ten or fifteen years earlier, have extraordinarily more finely tuned visual sensibilities, at least to judge from the ubiquity of advanced digital computation in so many arenas, from personal communication to shopping, from popular media to games. Entering undergraduates, with few exceptions, live in, and are aware of living in, a world space characterized by seeming global synchronicity and apparently free and instantaneous access to information about everything. They are adept at taking in -- to a certain degree processing-- simultaneous streams of information on multiple disparate topics.

Let me pause here. In what I have written I have not been able to exclude some troubling doubts (viz., "seeming," "apparently," "to a certain degree"). It may be no more than the *ressentiment* of one now decidedly middle-aged, but I certainly perceive some potential lacks and even losses. Among the former, I would instance the potential lack of awareness of how partial and often biased this seeming flood of information is. Among the latter may be an increasing disinclination, potentially even incapacity to focus on only one topic for a significant length of time or to follow a complex argument from beginning to end.¹⁴

Let me become even more drastic in my summary. The world, to cite the current cliché, is global in a new way, even "glocal." As our own personal space becomes ever more media saturated, the world is media-mediated as never before. Time has shrunk to an instantaneous now. What remains of the past -- if any trace remains -- is an increasingly simplified narrative, and as potential futures we are presented with a stark dichotomy, either endless pleasure via consumption and technological progress in a market economy or terrorist catastrophe. It seems that we approach a time -- if we have not already tipped over its edge -- when our role as consumers will displace our role as citizens. The advertising world and for-profit media already "hail" us as the former, and, more chillingly still, arguments that we as citizens should weigh and ponder for their potential benefit and risks are now simply pitched to us as if we were merely their prospective buyers. It is not post-modern theory that threatens "truth" so much as political and other self-righteous ideologies that no longer can, or no longer care to, distinguish between truth-telling and marketing. Far and wide there is a retreat from the enlightenment goals of reason, tolerance, and free speech; temporizing on civil liberties and human rights; and the deauthorization even of the scientific method. Threats to the

¹⁴ I am aware that all such "ubi sunt?" or "ou sont les neiges?" arguments are themselves doomed to failure, certainly in the long view, but whether privilege or folly, each generation can only measure change within each horizon in such a fashion.

maintenance of a vibrant democracy are real, and one senses already insufficient wariness, if not yet a downright embrace, of authoritarianism. Did I mention the challenges of unequal development globally (and ever more unequal distribution of wealth in our own country), the exhaustion of many traditional natural resources, the growing danger of severe ecological damage to the environment, and further potential health risks?

I expect many will take exception to some of the above characterizations, but such is the world I see today. Given such a world, precisely what form of education does Hampshire feel compelled to offer 400 or so high-school leavers each year? One is used to offering up the “liberal arts” as a sufficient nostrum, as colleges have done in recognizably the same form and often the same verbiage for decades, in some cases, centuries. This is not the place to rehearse the history of the concept in detail, but it is clear the Romans understood the *artes liberales* to be “liberal” virtually by definition: these were the non-mechanical pursuits that befitted free citizens (*liberales*) in Roman society. But as Martha Nussbaum notes, near the beginning of a book the entirety of which I highly recommend, Stoic thinkers had already repositioned the sense of the term “free” in this context: “an education...is ‘liberal’ in the sense that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world.”¹⁵

So many colleges fly under the banner of the “liberal arts,” and with so many different approaches, that one might well ask if the phrase has any real significance today. Now there is, I suppose, no cosmic necessity that it be more than a rallying cry, like so many other shibboleths of modern life, but, then again, to the extent that we in colleges and universities pride ourselves on precise definitions and language, that the term’s field of reference is so capacious strikes me as something of a scandal, and at least an embarrassment. I suppose at its core today it is, like the original concept, non-vocational, and while it does not offer the traditional disciplines of the medieval *septem artes* – which were, by the way, not quite so non-vocational for the students of medieval schools as the original propagandists of liberal arts would have expected¹⁶ – it does offer, in most forms, a “general education” whether arrived at via a set “great books,” a core of required courses, or guided choice among a myriad of electives. There is, by the way, nothing in the older liberal arts tradition that is a precursor for the “major” or “concentration”; this is a bow, if not to vocational, then certainly to pre-professional

¹⁵Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 8. Cp. the first-century Roman Stoic (and sometime tutor to Nero) Seneca: “you know why liberal studies are so called: because they are worthy of the free man. Rather, that course of study is truly liberal that makes the man free...” (*Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 88.2).

¹⁶The “seven arts” were divided into a first-stage, the *trivium* (“the three-way path”) of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, and a second-stage, the *quadrivium* (“the four-way path”) of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. All of these were studied in ways that made them preparation for clerics, a particularly apt preparation for the monks of the early period when the educational program was systematized. For example, arithmetic and astronomy were required to fix the date of Easter properly; geometry for dealing with monastic real estate; music for composing and performing the liturgy.

preparation whose easy admission into the liberal arts paradigm shows how lax its canons had become.¹⁷

Hampshire has quite frequently employed the language of “liberal arts,” and appropriately so given current understandings of the term, but Hampshire does not march to the same drummer as the vast majority of institutions that claim the label. The issue, as we ponder the question before us, is not “What is the right way to be a ‘liberal arts’ institution?” but, rather, as I have said, “What is the kind of education” -- and I would add, *distinctive* kind of education – “we wish to offer to a select set of young people who come to us each year?”

It seems to me that there is at least one other significant strand to the web Hampshire has woven that may prove helpful to us in developing an answer to this question. More than even the sum total of all its service-learning or community involvement activities – perhaps different in degree but not different in kind from programs at a number of other institutions – Hampshire has stood for a commitment to social action, to getting involved in the world and making it better. “Progress” is, after all, the root of “progressive.” At Hampshire, the “liberal arts” have never been an escape from the contemporary world. Craft and interpretation may be sharpened in the studio and study, respectively, but students, faculty, and staff have always brought their sharpened skills, enhanced artistry, and deeper and more sophisticated insight, in whatever field, back to the world. Students’ projects and the careers of so many of our alumni are about getting things done in the world. It is clarity about Hampshire’s commitment to preparing its students to “get things done in the world” that strikes me as offering the best way to understand and describe how Hampshire connects the academic with the social. It likewise seems to me the principle we should keep uppermost in our minds as we reformulate what has always been its mission in terms that should resonate broadly today.

Now, “getting things done in the world” can be construed in many ways, and one way I do not see it leading Hampshire would be away from one of the relatively few constants of the liberal arts tradition and towards strong “vocationalism.” I certainly would not recommend it. It is not that we want to pretend, with those who cling to the original sense of “liberal arts,” that we are preparing gentlemen [sic] for lives of cultured leisure or, thanks to such cultivation, expedited access to managerial and imperial cadres. The reality is this: virtually every one of our students is going to have to provide for him- or herself for four or more decades after leaving Hampshire by engaging in activities for which he or she will be compensated. Our alumni exemplify this, with as many significant representatives, and successes, in the for-profit as in the not-for-profit sectors.

Parents often ask the question: will Johnny or Joanie find a job with the education Hampshire offers them? Many parents (and many students) are limited in their imagination of the world of work; they also overestimate the value of training in any specific skill and underestimate the rate at which specific job requirements are evolving. If as a first-year student you are trained in a specific piece of software, it is more than likely that it will be out-of-date by the time you graduate. But this is a trivial example. In the world to come, the greater issue will not be one of finding jobs or work. It will be one

¹⁷In its traditional medieval form, the *septem artes* led all those who went on to theology. Medicine and law, the latter canon and secular, were also gradually introduced, but like theology, these were to be followed after completion of the fundamentals, including the mastery of (Latin) texts.

of creating one's own job, of fashioning one's own work life. Many of Hampshire's graduates have already discovered this and, I should add, have proven themselves skilled at creating businesses; it is they who are employing others. In most cases it appears true that creating or fashioning one's own work is the best way to see to it that, whatever the activity, it is satisfying to the individual and meaningful to the world. What Hampshire must do is to prepare students to create their own life of work.

Part of that preparation inheres in the process of making one's way at Hampshire, for Hampshire is part of the world, too. One of the great advantages of Hampshire's pedagogy, perhaps not initially intended but now clearly recognized, is that by demanding that students take the lead in organizing their own Division IIs and Division IIIs, bringing faculty to the table and negotiating with them first a program and then a project, they are being trained to get things done *period*. Each Division II contract signed, each one completed, each Division III approved, each one brought to successful conclusion – these are all “deals” that Hampshire students have made. It is not too much to say that Hampshire students are entrepreneurs of their own education. So many of our alumni have gone on to create new businesses, even new ways of doing business, that we already have a strong reputation as an incubator of entrepreneurs. And not only in the narrow sense of the word, for Hampshire students have been inspired to launch inventions of all sorts, from things and processes to new means of artistic expression and communication. Any listing will be partial. I can well imagine that, as we talk about our mission, and particularly about our pedagogy, we will find new ways to bring “getting things done in the world” more to the fore across the curriculum and across the schools.

It will, as often, be important to balance the analytical, the reflective, the interpretive, and the critical – in all areas – with the impulse to act. It is what is reflective and critical that most often provides the source of the new in any given field of endeavor. We would no more expect ourselves to train students for currently existing “jobs” than we train them in currently existing disciplines. Again, not every faculty member, perhaps not every school will be directly linking what is studied with how it can be instantiated in the world, but, in the way I outlined above, every faculty member and every school by virtue of its supervision of Division IIs and IIIs is helping the students prepare themselves for getting things done in the world. It is also of a piece with our pedagogic philosophy if students make the direct links for themselves.

If I am correct in having identified a traditional, if sometimes hidden, strength of Hampshire, and if I am correct that it will be worthwhile bringing it into even greater prominence, then new capacities will need to be developed in several areas of the college. It is much too early to say precisely what these capacities are, or precisely how they will be developed. These are decisions that must follow upon campus-wide deliberations, especially discussions between faculty and their dean and between the latter and the Dean of the Faculty. It might be helpful, as the process unfolds, to keep asking ourselves what will best prepare students to get things done in the world. One of the traditional claims of the “liberal arts” tradition, revealing its elitist origins more than it may have intended, is that it prepared “leaders.” Our students may become leaders in many ways, but in fact, in a democracy, and certainly in the world to come and already today, we cannot leave it only to the “leaders” to act. Every one must take on the responsibility of getting things done in the world, whether it is creating and running a business, bringing a legal action (or defending oneself in one), taking an active part in a non-profit enterprise (or simply contributing to it), getting a grant to do research and then publishing the results, creating art and performing or disseminating it, participating in politics at any level, trying to right an injustice, organizing a recycling effort, and so forth. One might call this active and responsible citizenship, although

perhaps other, more distinctive phrases may come to mind, especially since “citizenship” – notwithstanding its importance – now sounds utterly clichéd in college handbooks.

The language of “leadership” comes so easily. I admit that I indulged in it myself but a few months back, when, in my inaugural address, I said: “it is still the case that we look to colleges and universities to produce members of the community who are equipped to provide leadership and learning, inspiration and eloquence.”¹⁸ Depending on who the “we” of this sentence is, it might be true, but I realize now that the “we” is by no means universal. It strikes me now as highly dubious to think that most of our fellow citizens look upon liberal-arts graduates as individuals who can provide them leadership and learning, inspiration and eloquence. It’s not that these are not good things; they are not only good, they are sorely needed. But the most effective, and I would say the only, way we can add them back into the mix is to interpolate or insinuate them into the world from a myriad of places within it. How do we do this? We embody the values we hold dear in every action we perform, and to the degree our actions work impactfully in the world, we have an impact on the world. A great deal of damage can be done from the top down, and only now and then does some good come down from above. Transformation is only possible at the interstices, and it is these we must occupy and it is in these that we must act. What Hampshire College can do is be a learning community in which students develop values and the knack to make his or her interventions in the world both positive and effective.

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¹⁸ “Non Satis Scire,” October 15, 2005.