

Curriculum for Human Need

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To those interested in building better college curriculums, this article by John W. Harbeson, principal, Pasadena Junior College, California, should prove stimulating. Mr. Harbeson defines his concept of the function of the junior college in education, and discusses some of the curriculum requirements of such a college which can promote the fulfillment of many of the basic human needs of youth.

WHAT IS a junior college? The concept of educators and students the country over is by no means the same. In most situations, it is a two-year unit consisting of the freshman and sophomore years of the liberal arts college; in others, these years have been combined with the upper two high school years to form what is popularly referred to as the four-year junior college, the grades of which are designated freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, respectively, with no hard and fast line separating the twelfth and thirteenth grades. The concept of the junior college accepted in this study is that it comprises the topmost unit of the secondary school span.

The student bodies of the junior colleges fall naturally into two categories—those students who plan to continue university studies, and those for whom the junior college is the terminal point. The curriculum of the university preparatory group consists of those patterns of traditional subject-matter courses required for junior standing in the colleges and universities to which the students expect to transfer. That of the terminal group usually consists of a minimum foundation in general education expressed in terms of subject-matter courses drawn from many fields, followed by vocational curricula, or further courses in general education.

The following discussion is concerned primarily with the so-called *required subjects* of general education. The basic needs of man are so universal in character as to warrant a certain amount of required common studies on the part of all junior college students. There is also a legitimate place for electives to meet the peculiar needs or desires of individual students. It is conceded that any course, regardless of need, for which there is a sufficient demand to justify the formation of a class, has a legitimate place in the junior college curriculum, providing there is room for it over and above the minimum requirements set up to satisfy the common needs of the race.

The contents of the *required* courses should be determined by the common needs of man. In most instances, however, the traditional requirements of the past—and even of today—have been determined by the logical arrangement of subject matter. They have constituted the approach one would make if he were pursuing a field of specialization. As opposed to specialization, however, what the student of general education actually needs are understandings, relationships, and orientations.

Determine the Needs

A balanced program of living on the junior college level calls for an analysis

of human needs. Professor W. W. Charters accomplished this for Stephens College by analyzing the activities of a large body of its alumnae. A curriculum committee of General College of the University of Minnesota has classified the common needs of man in the following categories: (a) personal; (b) socio-civic; (c) home life; (d) vocational.¹ A more recent article states that the basic need of the school student is to achieve competence along the following lines: (a) to carry socio-civic responsibilities; (b) to carry socio-economic responsibilities; (c) to maintain and improve mental and physical health; (d) to engage in recreational activities.²

In another publication the author of this article, in collaboration with John A. Sexson, superintendent of schools in Pasadena, California sets forth his conception of the major areas of human need as follows:

1. *Personal*

Under this heading should be listed those needs which concern man as an individual, as, for example, the development of a worthy life philosophy which should constitute a working guide to personal living, involving the capacity and the desire to discriminate in values, and a determination on the part of the individual to appropriate to himself the good, the beautiful, and the true in the world about him to the end that in the course of his lifetime he may experience the most complete and consummate development possible of his individual personality; the development of high ethical standards; the framing of a guiding idealism; the development of capacities

¹ Ivol Spafford, *Problems and Progress in Curriculum Planning*, prepared by staff of General College, University of Minnesota, 1939. Mimeographed.

² Will French, *Popular Education at the Secondary School Level*, Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Vol. XXIV, February, 1940. p. 54.

which serve the individual, such as the cultivation of wholesome and worthy recreational activities; the development of appreciations, as of art, music, and the aesthetic contributions of the race; the development of aspirations, such as good will and the capacity to form and cultivate friendships, and many other objectives too numerous to name, but which have the common characteristics of applying to the individual as such rather than to society as a whole.

2. *Physical and Mental Health*

Under this category should be included those needs which contribute to the development and maintenance of sound, healthy bodies and a wholesome mental outlook. This would involve the development within the individual of regular habits of rest, sleep, exercise, moderation, and cleanliness; adequate knowledge and practice regarding diet; the effects of poisons and excessive stimulants; and the development of a balanced and integrated personality actuated by well-conceived and worthy life objectives.

3. *Socio-Civic*

This category includes those needs for a cooperation of the individual with his fellows and for sharing with them the responsibilities and privileges of a democratic society to the end that he may be surrounded by the social conditions which contribute most effectively to the maximum development of his personality and the society of which he is a part.

4. *Home Life*

Within the area of home life fall those needs pertaining to the harmonious functioning of the family as a biological and social unit and the individual's relation thereto.

5. *Vocational*

The vocational area embraces those needs which pertain to the selection of an appropriate lifework on the part of

the individual, by which he will earn a living for himself and his family, and an adequate training for effective service within this field.³

It is the opinion of the writer that there rests upon the public school system the obligation of adjusting all the children of the entire population for an efficient present and future functioning in each of these major areas of human need, and that a reasonable orientation or adaptation within these major fields constitutes a reasonable and practical concept of the requirements of general education.

Plan for the Needs

There are several possible approaches to carrying into effect the philosophy of general education as set forth in the preceding paragraphs:

(1) The traditional subjects may be maintained as in the past and administered under guidance. Few advocates of such a procedure would claim that *all* the requirements of the traditional curriculum should be continued in the future. Their most ardent hope would be that, under guidance, a selection could be made from the long list of available offerings to satisfy the life needs of each individual student. There are those, however, who believe that the extensive requirements in the patterns of the past can be justified as essential parts of a comprehensive program of general education.

(2) Subject matter may be reorganized into what are commonly called *integrated* courses. Integration cannot be effected by the mere inclusion of diverse materials in a single course. True

integration must be accomplished through the application of some unifying principle. An excellent example of this is to be found in the text by Eckels, Shaver and Howard entitled *Our Physical World* in which materials are drawn from virtually all the physical sciences to develop through integrated units of instruction the impact of science on man's social and civic progress.⁴ Courses of this type have become very common in junior colleges and, when properly organized, constitute a genuine improvement over the narrow subject-matter courses.

(3) There is the possibility of adapting the junior college program of general education to life needs by "beginning from scratch." Such a procedure with respect to requirements would constitute a major operation on the secondary curriculum but there are those who say that no other treatment will suffice.

Re-examine the Curriculum

A courageous thrust at such a solution is to be found in an article by Harlan Logan.⁵ On the subject of curriculum revision Logan says:

If the object of education is to help our children to develop into mature human beings able to meet the problems of, and take advantage of, the opportunities offered by today's world, then we must re-examine the list of subjects taught in our schools. What our children are taught should depend upon what they most urgently need to know—not upon a tradition set up in 1800, or upon the number of teachers who want to teach French or basket weaving.

⁴ Eckels, Shaver and Howard, *Our Physical World*. Benj. H. Sanborn & Co., 1938.

⁵ Harlan Logan, "The Hope of American Education," *Look*, October 1, 1946, pp. 21-27.

³ Sexson and Harbeson, *The New American College*, Harper and Brothers, 1946. pp. 243-244.

And then he sets forth his plan:

The plan covers the period from the first grade through the first two years of college. The subjects are listed in the order of their importance. The numbers in brackets represent school years in which subject should be taught.

A. *Self Expression*: speaking, writing, painting, music. (All years—first through fourteenth.)

B. *Self Knowledge*: the biological sciences (biology, physiology, psychology), as they help us to understand our bodies and our minds. (All years—first through fourteenth.)

C. *The Contemporary Arts*: beginning with current books, magazines, newspapers, movies, radio programs, buildings, pictures, and working back to the past to explain their origins or their development from important works of literature, art, and architecture in the past. (All years—first through fourteenth.)

D. *The World Today*: economic, sociological, and political movements and ideologies as they influence our lives today with a backward look at their origins and a forward look at their possible developments. (Beginning eighth year through fourteenth.)

E. *Science and the Future*: simple arithmetic and the physical sciences,—physics, chemistry and their application to our tomorrows. (Arithmetic, first through fifth year; physical sciences, sixth through fourteenth year.)

F. *Time and space*: astronomy, geology, and geography—the world as we see it today, in an air age, and as it has evolved through the ages. (First through tenth year.)

G. *Health and Cooperation*: a program of health instruction, constructive and corrective exercise, and team games. (All years—first grade through fourteenth grade.)

Mr. Logan continues his article by explaining why he has left out of the requirements such time-honored sub-

jects as foreign languages, history and mathematics (except as a tool subject).

Appraise the Requirements

If such a drastic reorganization as that proposed under item "3" is to be accomplished it should cover the entire span of the secondary school—grades seven to fourteen inclusive. To carry out the proposed plan the entire list of requirements in the eight-year secondary span should be temporarily set aside. A comprehensive statement of the common needs of man should be worked out, on the assumption that the entire secondary school population requires knowledge and understanding of these needs. Requirements should then be set up in the secondary curriculum with the sole purpose in view of satisfying these common needs. Old offerings should be restored to the extent—and *only to the extent*—that they constitute an answer to these needs. Where the old curriculum falls short it should be supplemented by new material and new experiences. Wasteful and ill-advised overlapping and duplication should not be permitted. Under such a procedure the curriculum requirements of the eight-year secondary span would be subjected to a continuous evaluation and reorganization, the modifications of which would be determined by the universal needs of mankind—and nothing else.

Orientation for College Levels

The 6-4-4 plan of school organization affords an excellent setting for such a reorganization. Under this plan the secondary school is divided into two units of four years each—a high school embracing grades 7 to 10 inclusive, and

a college embracing grades 11 to 14 inclusive. In a public school system the necessary coordination in curriculum revision is accomplished through a program of planning in which all participate.

In the college unit, the eleventh grade should be an adjustment year in which, through a program of careful guidance, the new student is given a gradual and effective orientation into college life. Having gone through this year of orientation, as a twelfth-grade student, he can be trusted with the full responsibilities and standards of college life and performance. During the war years, students were very generally admitted, on the completion of the eleventh grade, to regular freshman standing in standard colleges and universities where they achieved success. A considerable number of controlled scientific studies have been made of the ability of twelfth-grade students to do college work successfully, all of which have demonstrated college capacity at that stage of maturity. There is ample evidence to show that with a proper reorganization of the secondary curriculum over an eight-year span and the elimination of wasteful repetition and overlapping, a satisfactory foundation for genuine college work can be laid by the conclusion of the eleventh grade. In view of these facts why should the regular freshman college program not be substituted for the traditional twelfth-grade offerings? Instead of carrying the university preparatory student up to the junior year of college he could then be carried up to the senior year in the four-year junior college. Moreover, in view of the almost universal practice in higher education of telescoping the col-

lege and professional school, as a consequence of which the first year of the professional school is accepted as the senior year of college, the graduate of the four-year junior college could transfer to the professional school without further work on the college level.

Implications of the Proposed Plan

There are a number of interesting implications in the plan of curricular reorganization proposed under item number "3":

1. The four-year junior college could finish the program of general education insofar as it should be institutionally provided before admission to specialization, research or professional study in higher institutions. Actually, of course, general education extends from birth to death, and in a real sense is never completed. It cannot be completed even in the standard college of liberal arts. One might profitably continue his program of general education throughout life. There comes a time, however, when, purely in the interests of expediency, in order to begin his vocational career at a reasonable age, one must shift the emphasis from general to special or vocational training, and it is the contention of the writer that with a curricular procedure such as that recommended in the early portion of this paper, this shift of emphasis can advantageously take place on the completion of the junior college.

2. With the completion of general education at the junior college level the A.B. degree may logically be granted at that point.

3. Higher institutions could shift the emphasis from the conferring of the baccalaureate degree to that of the Mas-

ter's. This might well consist of a two-year program of specialization above the junior college and would eventuate in a better and more significant Master's degree than most of the Masters' conferred under present conditions.

4. Such a reorganization would make of the American university a genuinely *higher* institution. With their extensive offerings of secondary education in the freshman and sophomore college years they are, at present, hybrid institutions, partaking of the properties both of the secondary school and the university.

5. The proposed reorganization would result in extensive economies for the youth of America both in terms of time and money—a fact self-evident.

The writer is fully aware of the fact that such a drastic curriculum reorganization as that proposed in the foregoing paragraphs cannot be accomplished suddenly or even in the near future. The power of tradition is tremendous in controlling the affairs of men. Most people prefer error to change. The reorganization of estab-

lished patterns is painful. History has demonstrated repeatedly the almost invincible power of tradition in combat with human reason.

He does maintain, however, that the basic tenets proposed for curricular revision are philosophically sound, namely, that the *requirements* of general education should be determined solely by the common needs of man; that the imposition of *required* subjects not dictated by common or universal human needs, on unwilling students, constitutes an unjustifiable infringement on human freedom; that a junior college curriculum determined by human needs will result in a better type of general education; that a regrouping of grades which will implement the proposed curricular revision is most desirable; that the plan would transform the American university from its present hybrid character into a genuine institution of higher learning; and that it would provide for the student a much superior type of education in less time and at less expense.



Our Readers Say

SORRY! OUR READERS HAVE NOTHING TO SAY.

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