

A photograph of a college campus. On the left, a white building with arched windows is partially visible. In the center, a large, leafy tree stands prominently. In the foreground, two young women with backpacks are walking on a path, engaged in conversation. The scene is bright and sunny, with lush greenery.

Lighting the Mind for Action: A Call to Trustees and Leaders of America's Liberal Arts Colleges

**By Robert Knott, John Kuykendall,
Charles Reed, and David Wood**

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Preface

We four authors span four disciplines and the ideological spectrum yet share six convictions that prompted us to write this tract.

First, we're repelled by the current tone of public discourse that deepens political divisions into hatreds.

Second, we're frightened by the fracturing of life into small, separate compartments, producing a sense of helplessness in the face of large private and public entities.

Third, we've recognized that the relentless rate of technological innovation outruns the current liberal arts disciplines' capacity to portray the impact of technology on our lives.

Fourth, we've discovered that the liberal arts, if redefined as three distinct skills in language, can foster the good sense and resolve required to deal with the ethical and civic issues arising from this impact of technology. Once we drop the disciplinary boundaries of the current liberal arts, then the scope of the issues facing us - in health care or the environment, for example - ceases to be decisive. The relevant criterion becomes whether a given issue is of sufficient urgency or importance to merit the attention of students trained in the arts of language - persuasive speaking and writing, argument, and trained attention to the language of persuasive argument. In that role the ancient Greco-Roman liberal arts, invented as tools for civic participation, become once more what we call "civic arts."

Fifth, we've realized that colleges teach your child psychology or political science but balk at helping you talk with a spouse about how to raise a child or reflect with fellow citizens on how to repair your fractured community. Yet once we move beyond the disciplines to discussing what ought to be done in such cases, then the three liberal arts of language become the perfect delivery vehicles. We apply its ancient Roman name, *prudentia*, to such ethical or civic reflection. But make no mistake: Nostalgia has nothing to do with our wish to revive the ancient liberal arts. Indeed, our two "Historical Appendices" at the end of this tract launch a full-bore attack on the liberal arts for much of their history as mere initiations into polite society or as tools for domination.

And, sixth, we're convinced that such *prudentia* and resolve can be fostered in one setting alone -- the small, close-knit educational community that dedicates itself to fostering the civic arts. Something is broken in that world out there that a small liberal arts college can help fix.

1 Sept. 2017

Dear trustees and leaders at a liberal arts college,

In May of 1781 the future president John Adams wrote his young son, John Quincy, another future president, the following: "You will ever remember that all the end of study is to make you a good man and a good citizen." That ethical and civic thrust is now in danger of being lost. We regard it as the most precious part of "a liberal arts education" and address this tract to you in hopes of reviving it.

If you're a graduate of the school you serve as a trustee or leader, the campus looks reassuringly the same, save for a few new buildings -- a shaded haven of stability amidst the flux of modern life.

Looks are deceiving. Small liberal arts colleges were once tight little communities sewn together by ties of denomination, family, and region. None of these remain crucial threads in their fabric.

Students once spent most of their time with other students. The internet and smart phone now permit them to be in other places for extended periods without leaving their dorm rooms.

Small college faculty once devoted their time to teaching or mentoring students. Now teachers at small colleges are expected to publish; some even see teaching as secondary to scholarship.

Once college teachers prided themselves on serving as models of high character and overall cultivation. Today's faculty rely on the campus chaplain as a beacon of character and see themselves as specialists, no more widely read than those in other walks of life.

Most of the staff at the colleges of old learned their jobs without benefit of special training. Now what we call "professionalization" enables every part of even a small campus to talk past the others in its own jargon.

This brief tract urges you to knit your college back together again by returning to the liberal arts' ancient goal that still prevailed in John Adams' day - the goal of lighting students' minds for ethical and civic action.

Ours is far from an "all or nothing" prescription. We ask you to consider if any of the ideas that follow might be appropriate for your school.

Respectfully,

Robert Knott, President Emeritus of Tusculum and Catawba Colleges
John Kuykendall, President Emeritus of Davidson College
Charles Reed, William S. Lee Prof. Emeritus of History, Queens Univ. of Charlotte
David Wood, former Provost and current Senior Vice-President for Advancement, Wofford College

Chapter 1

A Summary of Our Case (by all four authors)

If we examine the current situation in America with its past in mind, we see that what we call “modernization” has

(1) cut us off from our past and

(2) divided us from one another in the present.

(3) American communities need civic leaders from many vocations to bring people together in the public sphere *as citizens*.

(4) Such leaders must enrich their good sense about what to do in the civic sphere and master the original liberal arts of persuasive argument and careful listening.

(5) But are good sense and eloquence enough? They must also earn the trust of those to whom they speak through strength of character as well as with their words.

(6) *The main point of our tract: America’s small liberal arts colleges are the most promising site for developing such civic leaders.*

(7) In this role a liberal arts college reverts to the mission envisioned by America’s founders -- service to our republic.

(8) These colleges also would revive the original liberal arts as *civic arts* – tools necessary for leadership in ancient Athenian democracy and in the Roman republic. *When separated from that civic role, the liberal arts degenerate into cultural frills or, worse, tools for deception or domination.*

(9) Students can practice ethical reflection and civic deliberation in and out of the same courses required for all, thanks to a college’s small size. And various activities that already exist on a small campus can be retooled to strengthen certain habits of character.

(10) Incorporating the civic arts into and out of the classroom in no way keeps students from preparing for professional or graduate training.

(11) With strong leadership the changes we recommend can be made in a single generation of students, with few changes to campus institutions or courses and at little expense.

(12) The upshot: More than ever today America needs men and women who, by force of word and dint of character, offset the popular media, raise the level of public debate, and repair the civic fabric of splintered communities.

1. Unmoored from the Past

How many grandchildren still look to their grandparents as guides for how to live? It wasn't so long ago that grandchildren did just that, when the past for one generation was pretty much the future for the next.

Does anyone believe that's still true? A glance at the ease with which a grandchild navigates the net or uses a smart phone tells us that almost no one does. Think about how many of the most basic institutions have changed – the rituals of death, the sanctity of marriage, roles for women, or the closeness of community. The rise of American big business in the late nineteenth century marks the point at which our world began to change on a scale comparable to changes following the invention of agriculture thousands of years ago.

In that world we've lost, one generation more or less successfully passed on its culture to the next. Given the rapid changes we call "modernization," this no longer is the case. By "culture" we don't mean "couth." We refer instead to the basic modes of behavior and codes of meaning vital for the living of a human life. Today it's easy to prattle about "values." "Culture" here refers instead to the deeply ingrained patterns of behavior or belief people take for granted.

In those olden days people pretty much agreed on the best sort of human being such a transmission of culture could produce. He or she was a person of character and good sense, a person "finely aware and richly responsible" (in the words of the novelist Henry James), a person on whom you could count. Back then people saw a crucial difference between being good at engineering or surgery and being good at being a human being.

If you had asked people in that bygone world how they planned to transmit culture (in the sense defined above) from one generation to the next, there would have been broad agreement: the *family* above all fostered character and good sense. It was taken for granted that the child's world would be similar enough to that of the parents for parental admonitions to apply. And what the family left undone, two other agencies – the church and one's community – would complete.

2. Unmoored from One Another

Would you agree that today family, local community, and church have lost some of their power to shape a person's character and good sense? And if one asks why these have lost their power, observers on the right and left agree for a change: it's because other agencies have eroded the effects those older, character-forming agencies once had. A complex economy, large

bureaucracies, and technology – these now play the dominant role in shaping Americans, and they're here to stay.

By all means relish the irony. If our country is to compete in that highly-publicized war over world markets, it must rely on a surging economy, well-functioning bureaucracies, and improved technologies. Yet the more efficient these sectors become, the more they threaten to tear our children's lives apart.

To put it another way: The same new agencies delivering ever more convenient tools for living also fragment, privatize, and impoverish the lives they thus "improve." The transmission of what we've called "culture" from one generation to the next is seriously jeopardized. In the 1700's Samuel Johnson remarked to his future biographer, James Boswell, about an acquaintance who "hung loose upon society." We'll continue to live in a world where more and more people "hang loose upon society" – loose from family, loose from their local communities, and loose from a system of belief that sustains them.

And in spite of more labor-saving devices and slimmer smart phones, life will get tougher for us and our children as the pace of change quickens. The "looser" we become from society, the more decisions we must make. In a world of other individuals loose from trust, loyalty, or just plain moral responsibility, I as a young adult must take almost everything a day at a time. Whom can I count on today? Every morning, for example, I may wake and do a cost-benefit analysis of my feelings. And my doubts, shared by thousands of other loose, self-absorbed individuals, turn into a fiendishly self-fulfilling prophecy. It becomes in everyone's interests to assume that things won't continue as they are for too long. So people, finding that they can't count on one another, cut back on their commitments. "Thus openness, which is the largest part of noble character . . . vanished . . . , destroying all trust," wrote the ancient Greek historian Thucydides more than 2500 years ago.

3. The Need for Civic Leaders

Our social fabric is dissolving into millions of individuals who have forgotten how to depend upon one another, who see America as a zero-sum game in which, for some to "win," others must "lose."

How can we repair that fabric? Part of the solution should strike you as ironic in the extreme: we'll recommend reviving 2400 year-old verbal tools to repair the fragmenting and isolating effects of modernization.

We must develop civic leaders of character and good sense who can transform isolated, often estranged, individuals back into *citizens* – a role neglected and

often forgotten today, especially by the popular media and universities. Many of what Americans view as personal problems are actually public issues that citizens can gather to talk about and fix. Those conversations not only raise competing possibilities. They also bring new possibilities to mind.

Forgotten, too, is a realm known as *the public sphere* in which citizens operate. That sphere has been suppressed and superseded by the economic and social spheres. Far from being confined to a voting cubicle on election day, the public sphere consists of all the forums for addressing issues of concern to citizens: It can be the P.T.A., a block association, or a civic club; it was the church during the abolitionist movement of the mid-1800's and the civil rights struggle of the 1960's. In such forums, we're convinced, civic leaders of character and good sense, armed with the ability to listen carefully and argue persuasively, can do much to revitalize communities.

That last claim invites the charge of "elitism." Why not *all* participants, not just leaders? We hope leaders can galvanize others into becoming civic actors, but we're under no illusion about the source of that impetus. We unashamedly admit to being "elitist." Only if "elitist" is taken to mean "snobbish" do we deny the label; snobbery is unmerited and often cruel. But if the term "elitist" is applied to those who think that some people are more to be admired for qualities of character or mind or achievement, then we qualify as "elitists." We submit, further, that the American failure to perceive the distinction between snobbery and elitism has debased our media, our morals, and our manners.

4. The Latin Word *Prudentia*

We've been using the term "good sense" to describe the ability to make good choices. We need a more comprehensive term that's understood to include not only thinking about how things ought to be on a private level but also on a public scale.

The academic term for ethical and civic "good sense" is "practical reason," but the word "practical" also means "applied." The ancient Greek equivalent, *phronesis*, is both long gone and desperately foreign. So we opt for that old Latin word *prudentia* to mean either ethical reflection or civic deliberation, especially since America's founders still used the word "prudence" in exactly the same sense as *prudentia* - thinking about how to act or what to do in one's own life *or* in a larger, public arena.

College courses before the Civil War focused mainly on *prudentia*, on thinking about how things *ought to be* -- about how one *ought* to live -- whereas college courses today aim at exact knowledge about how things *are* and include a lot of

facts that have nothing to do with living one's life.

Do you begin to see the chasm separating your education from that offered before the Civil War? Dare you admit to yourself how little of the exact knowledge you learned in college bears on the everyday life you now lead? You rise in the morning, eat breakfast, then *prudentia* kicks in. How will you advise your first client of the day on a crucial decision she must make? Your son asked for counsel on which college to attend; what to tell him? And, longer-range, have you decided whether to accept that job offer by a firm in another city?

Thus does *prudentia* pervade every nook and cranny of our daily lives. Don't you find it strange, then, that your college education neglected it, save for the advice offered by coaches, those case-based business courses, and the single ethics course you took? Had you raised the subject with your professors, they might have said that such thinking was "subjective" and hence inappropriate for the discipline they taught.

"Subjective?" Your choice of whether to marry, whom to marry, what profession to take up, whether to have children, how to raise a child, where to settle - all these, the most important decisions in your life - these are "subjective" or, worse, "judgmental," and therefore out of bounds for careful examination in college courses? You know full well that you devoted much thought to each of those crucial decisions, that you went from knowing less to knowing more about what to do, even if you couldn't know the outcome for certain. Your criteria were "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "bad" - not exact yardsticks like "true" and "false," but far from being arbitrary.

For over a millennium and a half, except for a medieval interval, Western higher education was devoted to helping students make those rationally defensible choices about how to live their lives. The basic assumption: thinking about how to live was a more important use of the human intellect than the discovery of facts.

Then after the Civil War, as we mentioned earlier, the purpose of the liberal arts changed fundamentally. Up to then the liberal arts prepared one to exercise *prudentia* - that is, to think about how to act ethically or deliberate well as a citizen. But after 1880 the various liberal arts "disciplines" (as they were called) aimed at exact knowledge about how things are - at scientific knowledge rather than *prudentia*.

One of us owns two cats, Yoyo and Ma. Each day he watches them roam around his property, marking its boundaries with their urine. After 1880 each discipline began to perform its own version of what his cats do daily: each discipline began to rely on advanced degrees, refereed journals, and

professional associations to mark its own bailiwick. The entry to a discipline was jealously guarded, and the properly credentialed expert who emerged had been socialized in exquisite ways that make Marine boot camp look dilettantish.

5. But Is *Prudentia* Enough?

Below we'll defend the liberal arts college as the best, indeed the *only*, site for reviving *prudentia* in American higher education. It can take many forms – high aspiration in Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech, political canniness in Lincoln's maneuverings to push through Congress the bill abolishing slavery in parts of the South, or Hitler's low cunning in imprisoning or eliminating those opposed to him in the 1930's. If *prudentia* is to take the high road, it must be powered by good character.

Can a liberal arts college quite deliberately improve a student's character? The answer given by educators from the ancient Greeks to antebellum college presidents was, "Yes." Character-shaping was seen as one of its major goals along with sponsoring ethical reflection and civic deliberation. College presidents meant by "character" something utterly unmystical. They had watched four years at their college modify certain habits of character in readily identifiable ways – "putting the college's mark on students," as they phrased it. It was taken for granted, in other words, that a cohesive, purposefully organized *campus*, rather than *courses*, enhanced certain habits of character.

We've seen that happen in so many down-home ways. We've witnessed a coach's advice or example and a chaplain's counsel alter the direction of a student's life; we've watched as students modelled themselves after faculty mentors; and we've seen an honor system become so securely lodged in students' souls as to last far beyond their college years. *Yet these days even small colleges founded by Christian denominations see the improving of character as none of a school's business at all.*

6. The Main Point of Our Tract

We've now deployed all the basic terms and ideas. To recapitulate: Cut off in crucial ways from the resources available from our past, and cut off from one another in ways without precedent in the present, we need to recreate in communities a **public** sphere – as distinct from a *social* or *economic* sphere. In that public space, civic leaders of character, disposed to step out of their professional roles and armed with the arts of persuasive speech in the service of *prudentia*, can persuade others to take seriously their role as *fellow citizens* in improving the quality of their lives and of their community.

Our main point: If we survey the horizon of America's higher education today, we see that its small liberal arts colleges are the most promising site for developing such civic leaders.

Will the proportionally small number of graduates produced by our small liberal arts colleges make a decisive difference? We believe they can. We think of the small number of New Englanders who first sponsored the effort to abolish slavery, of the nucleus of American women who began the suffragette movement in the late 1800's, and of that handful of African-American leaders in every Southern city responsible for sparking the local effort for civil rights.

On that honor role should appear as well the names of 19th century civic leaders who founded liberal arts colleges as Americans moved westward. *There's nothing like these small schools in the rest of the world, you know.*

7. Service to the Republic

And today you can recall those colleges to their heritage, for it's in a liberal arts college's DNA to serve as a seminary for civic leadership. In *Historical Appendix 2* below we record how Americans, beginning in our own revolutionary period, remodeled or created from scratch small liberal arts colleges as nurseries of leaders for the new nation. *During and after the American Revolution, no undergraduate institution in any other nation except America developed its mission with service to the Republic so explicitly in mind.*

8. The Liberal Arts as Civic Arts

In *Historical Appendix 1* we describe an earlier heritage: The original liberal arts were invented in ancient Athens as *civic arts*, as tools for leadership in the public sphere for the benefit of *all* of one's fellow citizens. In our survey of their long career that follows Chapter 2, we hold the liberal arts to this high standard: Granted that higher education until the 20th century was reserved for the very few, **we apply the term "civic arts" only to higher schooling that propelled privileged graduates into their communities for the purpose of benefiting not just themselves but less-privileged citizens as well.**

To be even more specific: our two historical appendices are devoted to answering a question never raised so explicitly before: "In what periods of Western history did the liberal arts qualify as civic arts, and when did they fail to do so? Our answer to that question is one that Americans, especially America's educational leaders, need to heed: **Whenever the liberal arts become divorced from their role as civic arts, they putrefy, degenerating into either badges of genteel refinement or, worse, tools for deception or domination.**

One further and crucial point about the original liberal arts invented in Ancient Greece: For two thirds of their 2500 year-old history, down to roughly 1450 CE, the liberal arts referred not to specific subject matters but to three “discipline-free” uses to which language could be put – to argue, to persuade, or to comprehend the elements of persuasive argument. You’ve doubtless heard of the formal names for these uses -- logic, rhetoric, and grammar.

We recommend a return to the liberal arts understood in their tripartite form, not as a series of disciplines seeking exact knowledge but as the verbal means of lighting citizens’ minds for civic action. The original liberal arts are the perfect delivery-vehicle for *prudentia*: if you’re intent on helping people think about what to do, you don’t rely ultimately on scientific thinking about how things *are*; after considering the facts, you resort to well-argued persuasion in order to get people to *act* in this way or that.

These days the original liberal arts have another significant advantage: Pressing issues such as climate change, healthcare reform, or genetic engineering outrun the liberal arts disciplines as defined after 1880, spilling over into what we regard as non-liberal arts fields such as technology, finance, and the like. The original liberal arts are conveniently unbounded: You can argue about *any* issue vitally affecting our lives or our communities. And you acquire the verbal tools to identify and combat political demagoguery on the left or right.

9. “Small Is Good” in Several Crucial Ways

In the next chapter we recommend a few tweaks to the curriculum and more changes to the non-curricular side of a campus.

The few curricular changes encourage ethical reflection, civic deliberation, and a familiarity with America’s history in courses required of all students. Such campus-wide courses are impossible to arrange at large universities.

More important, we think, are certain alterations to the campus atmosphere that develop certain dispositions in students. Here the difference in size between small colleges and universities becomes most evident. It’s not a matter of creating new campus entities so much as refocusing the activities of those that already exist. Such a refocus is almost impossible to do campus-wide at large universities.

Chapter 2 spells out the concrete steps a small college can take to become a *small republic*. Encouraged by their involvement therein, students are more likely than students at universities to try to make a difference in the larger communities they enter as graduates. Not only do the big schools neglect

character development, ethical reflection, and civic deliberation; the large university also serves, quite unintentionally, as a training ground for later civic passivity. The overwhelmed first-year student asks, "How can I possibly make a difference in such a huge place?" Then, discouraged, he or she settles into one or another convenient niche.

10. Yes, Students Can Still Qualify for Professional or Graduate Training

The four of us honor the disciplines, liberal or otherwise, in which students now major or minor. They produce new knowledge. By studying them students learn how to tell the true from the false. And they serve as stepping stones for professional or graduate training. So courses in the disciplines will continue to dominate what students take as undergraduates in small liberal arts colleges.

But disciplines aren't confined to small colleges. In fact, the disciplines often can be studied to greater effect and more cheaply at large universities, which offer more disciplines and more facilities for disciplinary study and research.

If, on the other hand, the ethical and civic thrust of the early American colleges is lost, won't today's small colleges be hard pressed to justify their very expensive existence?

11. It Will Take Only Four Years and Little Expense to Make the Changes

With strong leadership, the changes we suggest in our final chapter could take place in a single generation of students, so that the school's distinctiveness would be evident in short order to prospective parents and students. Our years in education have taught us that its small size doesn't necessarily make a college a cosy, supportive place; some are as lonely as shopping malls or welfare hotels.

That won't be the case in the sort of college we have in mind. Our college can say truthfully, "Here's a place unlike most other liberal arts colleges, not to mention universities. Not only can we help your son or daughter get into medical or law school; we also can help him or her commit to making a difference in the world out there." Further, the changes we suggest will add practically nothing to a small college's already straitened budget.

12. Summary

Ethical reflection, civic deliberation, and character development: are these outdated goals, valuable perhaps for a slower age but out of date in our own fast-changing world? Look around you:

There's widespread agreement that family, church, and local community have lost some of their power to shape character. If ever we thought that good character was the basis for a stable, flourishing life, don't we need it even more now?

There's widespread agreement that sludge issuing from the popular media will prompt more and more young people to rely on ever-shifting criteria for social acceptance in measuring human worth. If ever ethical reflection helped students acquire more durable standards for gauging human fineness and living their lives, don't we need that even more now?

There's widespread agreement that in election years the caliber of debate at every level of government is low, *too* low. If ever we viewed genuine civic deliberation and leadership as the lifeblood of this Republic, don't we need them even more now?

The question then becomes, how can we reknit a small liberal arts college into a more cohesive community that produces leaders of character who revive a public sphere? We'll next offer a series of concrete recommendations on how that might be done. Then in two historical appendices we'll recapitulate the long career of the liberal arts. When did they qualify as civic arts, and when did they not? It's a story hitherto untold.

Chapter 2

Reviving the Liberal Arts as Civic Arts Today

(by J. Kuykendall and C. Reed)

Here are some suggestions, organized by roles within a liberal arts college, for trustees to consider. We omit duties conventionally assigned to each role and focus on aspects required by a civic arts commitment. Please recall that the civic arts are the three activities aimed at lighting students' minds for ethical and civic action – persuasive speaking, cogent arguing, and incisive listening. Recall, too, that the term *prudentia* refers to the deliberation that precedes ethical or civic action.

Trustees: We urge you to choose as fellow trustees those whose civic involvement serves as a model for others at your college and in your community. We also hope that each trustee can spend a week on campus to serve as an approachable role model for students and to appraise the state of the civic arts in action.

Most people on and off a campus regard the school's president as embodying what the school stands for. So trustees should choose a leader whose character and civic-mindedness speak for the college's devotion to the civic arts.

Trustees also should ask: Are senior faculty rewarded for orienting and mentoring newly-hired teachers? Are strong incentives built into the criteria for salary, promotion, and tenure for teaching the discipline-free courses described below? Are there special awards, with funds attached, to reward teachers, coaches, or staff noted for their efforts to bring the college community together?

A useful litmus test applying to all on campus except students: *Which comes first?* Is this person a vital member of this college community who also happens to be a teacher, coach, or staff member? Or is he or she a teacher, coach, or staff member who just happens to be a member of this community?

Staff: Every employee is an equal citizen in the small republic that a civic arts college must become. Sadly, we four authors have visited small colleges where this is far from the case. *We therefore urge trustees to see that employees other than senior administrators and faculty feel they are vital, respected members of that community.*

A civic arts college isn't the typical work place, with a nine-to-five schedule and

a role confined to a single professional slot. Every prospective administrator, staff member, or coach must be evaluated with the following criteria in mind: Does this person's character and *prudentia* make him or her a good role model for students? Is he or she eager to take part in the community's life over and above the obligations of the job? Are coaches and Student Life staff eager to meet at least twice monthly with new teachers in order to help teachers understand the roles played by coaches and Student Life personnel? Do staff and faculty across the entire campus have a specified date, place, and time -- once a month, say -- to gather for coffee and a brief chat?

Students: A small liberal arts college can be a powerful engine for a student's growth: Its demanding honor code provides an anchor for ethical behavior; its many opportunities for leadership, a rehearsal for civic activity in later life. Most graduates testify that they were shaped more by the college community at large than by their courses.

The admissions staff must explain to students and parents how this college's civic arts mission enters into every nook and cranny of college life. Can Admissions people allay parental misgivings? Do they try to gauge an applicant's character? Do they ask if he or she understands a college's honor code? More queries for applicants: Do they relish the opportunity to take part in as many aspects of community life as possible? Do they demonstrate a strong interest in public affairs? Are they eager to learn how to speak publically, in and out of the classroom?

To attract civic-minded students the college might establish a "*Prudentia* Internship and Apprenticeship Network." A select group of students, enabled perhaps by P.A.I.N. scholarships, would spend all four years working on societal problems through apprenticeships in the community. We mean more than merely "service"; the community *becomes* their classroom. Trustees and alums could serve as a network of mentors.

Alums: A civic arts college dedicates itself to becoming a small republic in which young people play multiple roles, civilly debate public issues, and learn to care well for one another. Then as graduates they enter the fractured communities of our larger republic. "The proof is in the pudding": Do they participate, speak, and show mutual concern in these larger communities? Do they also return to their Alma Mater with testimonies that embolden present-day students? And do they alert the college about high school students with a marked affinity for what a civic arts college offers?

Faculty: We've saved the biggest challenge for last. Graduate school intensely socializes fledgling college teachers into thinking of themselves as resident

experts in their disciplines, professional isolates in a college's cluster of other highly-credentialed isolates. And some faculty look down their noses at other employees on campus.

How nip such conceits in the bud? The first step is to acknowledge the problem in plain English, as we have just done. The next is for trustees to insist that new teachers be hired with extraordinary care. Anyone interested in applying for a faculty post should meet the college's high standards for character and *prudentia*, a person whom students and colleagues come to admire in those respects.

An applicant must to be told forcefully in the job interview that at this civic arts college he or she not only must get to know students well; his or her principal roles are to teach and serve as a mentor and advocate for them. Is the applicant attracted by these roles, or does he or she see them as obstacles in the path of enhancing a professional resume?

Once hired, a new teacher should arrive and settle into new quarters at least three weeks before school begins. He or she then will attend an all-day, two-week orientation conducted by senior faculty and staff. Assigned a faculty mentor from outside his or her discipline, with an office next to teachers from other disciplines, new faculty will meet twice a month or more for the first two years with an athletic coach and a member of the Student Life staff.

Each new teacher in the physical and social sciences will join other physical and social science teachers in offering a junior-level course in **civic deliberation and action** required of all students. Each new teacher in the Humanities will join other Humanities faculty in teaching a required, senior-level course in **ethical reflection and choice**. Each course would occupy a single semester, although a year-long course devoted to each would be preferable.

We must resist the impulse to call these two courses "inter-disciplinary." Recall that anything disciplinary, in whatever admixture, aims at knowing for certain. The first two of the three courses that follow employ **an entirely different mode of thinking we call *prudentia***. They deal with thinking *not* about what is the case, however intermingled the topics under discussion, but about what we ***should do*** or how we ***should act***. To put it another way, they are *discipline-free* - altogether *outside* disciplinary thinking, *not* inter-disciplinary.

Take first the course in **civic deliberation and action**: What to deliberate about? Most of the major problems we face as citizens have to do with the impact of new technology on modern life - the spiraling cost of medical technology, privacy issues arising out of invasive electronic technology, reproductive issues out of biotechnology, and the environmental threat caused by various technologies.

Think, then, of a two-tier system, the first a disciplinary component offering solid knowledge about, say, the various systems of health care around the world or about the environment. Follow that with a discipline-free component of persuasive argument, in which students debate what to do about our medical care or the environment. The debate – an exercise in civic *prudentia* -- will traverse several liberal arts disciplines in the social and physical sciences. And why not ask teachers, new and old, to model how to civilly agree to disagree in campus-wide debates? That's what faculty regularly did at the University on Paris in the 13th and 14th centuries.

How sponsor **ethical reflection and choice**? We find the answer at the very beginning of the discipline-free liberal arts. The ancient Sophists and Socrates first applied the original liberal arts of rhetoric and argument to debating how one should live. Let teachers from across the Humanities bring texts to bear on students' lives, sparking discussion and debate. Literature should hold pride of place, we think, not works of philosophy. A novel, short story, or play portrays far better than a philosophical text the richly-nuanced considerations we term *ethical prudentia*.

Literature also sparks a capacity for sympathy that allows us to enter into others' situations. Two and a half centuries ago Adam Smith explained how that capacity is developed at the outset of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. . . . By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him."

At this point faculty in the English department will insist that one can do more with literature than evoke sympathy and draw ethical conclusions. We utterly agree, but here we're not in the business of viewing literature through the prism of a discipline; we approach it solely within the limits of the discipline-free civic arts as a means for discussing "How ought I to live?"

A college faculty has yet a third means of demonstrating its commitment to the civic arts. Every student should leave college fully aware of America's proud civic arts heritage: ***We're citizens of a republic that for the first time in human history accorded dignity to ordinary people doing real work for a living. A far greater proportion of Americans had the opportunity to practice the civic arts earlier than in any other modern nation.***

Sound civic deliberation can't occur in a historical vacuum, yet anyone who follows recent events must be aware of how ignorant Americans are of their

own heritage. (This ignorance extends right up through the professional ranks, sad to say.) Every civic arts graduate should acquire a grounding in our founding documents and subsequent history. We therefore urge historians to teach at least a semester-long course, chock full of biography, to all second-year students on campus, *before* they encounter the above junior and senior-level discipline-free courses in civic deliberation and ethical reflection. The lives of John Winthrop, Dorothea Dix, or George Catlett Marshall can fuel later exercises in ethical reflection as well as civic deliberation.

Finally, we must revive in modern guise the ancient Greco-Roman emphasis on rhetoric. In the first year every student should be required to take a semester's course in **public speaking and debate** to develop his or her rhetorical skills in the later required courses -- American history in the second year and (in the third and fourth) civic deliberation and ethical reflection.

We've proposed ancient remedies for modern ills. So it's appropriate to end our tract with Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 BCE), known as Cato the Younger to distinguish him from his great-grandfather. A fine orator himself, Cato was a close friend of Cicero, renowned for his character, *prudentia*, and modest way of life. And like Cicero Cato died in defense of his beloved Republic against the threat of one-man rule by Julius Caesar. His name became a byword for resistance to tyranny for our own Founding Fathers, thanks to a series of British letters entitled *Cato's Letters*.

Cicero's and Cato's notion of freedom was independence from the arbitrary power of others. Today millions of our fellow Americans feel subject to powers they have no control over and no voice in contesting. We desperately need civic leaders nurtured in the arts of speech and disposed to reach these citizens. We respectfully ask that you bear that in mind as you consider our proposals.

Historical Appendix 1

The European Birth and Eclipse of the Liberal Arts as Civic Arts (by C. Reed)

Prelude

The two most famous champions of ancient rhetoric and oratory, Demosthenes and Cicero, died violently in political upheavals. Odd, then, that histories of higher education ignore or downplay connections between the liberal arts and politics.

This chapter and the next redress that omission. **They ask, “When in the past did a higher education in the liberal arts propel graduates into their communities for the purpose of benefiting not only people like themselves but others beneath their class as well?”**

And the single most important thing we’ll say about the liberal arts is *how seldom they qualified as civic arts!*

For only three “moments” in the long history of Western higher education did it produce leaders bent on lighting their fellow citizens’ minds for ethical and civic action – Athenian democracy between 462 and 323 BCE, the late Roman republic from 133 to Cicero’s death in 43 BCE, and the American Revolutionary period from 1765 to c. 1800 CE.

Why so seldom? The answer lies in the make-up of traditional European and colonial American societies. Both were arranged in a steep hierarchy wherein the few ruled the many. From ancient Greece right down to America in the 20th century, less than 4% of any given population received a higher education. That tiny class monopolized wealth, power, and status in Europe and early America down through the eighteenth century CE.

For most of Western history this upper class also denied ordinary people a voice in their own affairs. Why? Because the upper class believed ordinary people too ignorant and volatile to deserve a voice. By “ordinary people” we mean not just the “down and outs” but also shopkeepers, farmers, and artisans. What so engaged the contempt of their betters? That ordinary people did real work for a living.

We must re-enter that traditional, deeply hierarchical world that differs so radically from our own, if we’re to understand the purposes served by higher education before 1800 CE. The liberal arts curriculum taken by upper-class

Europeans and Americans from its Athenian origins into the 19th century should surprise us: In a given era males from the same privileged background read the same books, the identical books that their fathers had read as students and that their sons in turn would read.

But we haven't yet mentioned the most daunting feature of the old liberal arts: The books you read at school were in Greek and Latin (and later in Hebrew). You almost never read anything in your native English, French, or German. You read uncritically, to love and live by what you read. For the rest of your life you could call on those old books for examples of how to comport yourself. Research was discouraged.

Their higher schooling provided upper-class Europeans and colonial Americans with the same distinctive speechways, the same well-rehearsed manners, and the same code of meaning that set them apart from everyone else, despite the manifold languages, dialects, and folkways further down the social ladder. This role as a guarantor of social continuity and cohesion accounted for the original liberal arts' educational dominance throughout much of Western history.

The Birth of the Liberal Arts as Civic Arts in Athens (462-322 BCE)

Democratic Athens was a bustling, diverse city-state of a quarter-million people, the hub of economic and cultural life in the Greek world of the eastern Mediterranean, and a magnet for expatriate intellectuals, guest-workers, and visiting merchants. It offered a direct voice in their own affairs and access to due process in its courts to all 40,000 or so of its male citizens, most of them working farmers.

Athens was not only the birthplace of the liberal arts. More notably, it also was the birthplace of the liberal arts as civic arts. What we call the liberal arts originated as rhetorical skills indispensable for leadership in the new democracies of classical Greece. (Sadly, we know little about the democracies outside Athens.)

In the mid-to-late 400's BCE foreigners called "Sophists" arrived in Athens to teach such skills, charging wealthy Athenians considerable sums for help in reaching mass audiences. Their instruction included portions of what the Romans called *artes liberales* – "rhetoric" (techniques of persuasion), "dialectic" (argument), and "grammar" (the elements of language investigated by certain Sophists but not developed into a formal program of "language and literature" until later). These three activities -- persuasive speaking, cogent arguing, and attention to the elements of language -- constitute *the three liberal arts of language*. **When they're aimed at lighting citizens' minds for action, they**

become the civic arts.

Liberal education becomes civic education when they believe ordinary citizens capable of assessing well the results of upper-class political leadership – when, in other words, ordinary citizens are capable of what we’ve call *prudentia*, the ability to deliberate well about one’s ethical and civic behavior. The greatest of the Sophists, Protagoras, uttered what might be regarded as the Magna Carta of the civic arts in a conversation with Socrates (in Plato’s *Protagoras*): Protagoras admits that some are granted special talents in particular crafts, but “with proper upbringing every person is competent to give advice in questions related to . . . justice or the rest of the excellence of a citizen . . . so that your fellow citizens are right to regard both blacksmith and cobbler as competent to offer advice on political matters.” **In other words, ordinary citizens -- not just experts or a leisured elite – are capable of *prudentia*.**

In the century after Protagoras both Athenians and foreigners set up private schools in Athens. The Athenian Isocrates (435-338 BCE) focused on rhetoric, charging a pretty penny to upper-class Athenian males. His fellow Athenian, Plato (429-347), founded an academy for philosophy, as did Aristotle (384-322), a pupil of Plato and a Macedonian resident in Athens. Isocrates’ students outnumbered those of either of these competitors. In fact, for the remainder of antiquity wealthy Greek and Roman males opted in far greater numbers for a “higher education” in rhetoric than one in philosophy. Another crucial feature to note: Higher education from Isocrates’ day until the 19th century CE focused on speaking well, not on writing well. Writing served as a mere prelude to speaking.

We should regard Isocrates as the founder of the liberal arts tradition. Romans and later Europeans accorded that title to Cicero, to whom we give due credit in turn. But Cicero learned two huge things from Isocrates:

First, Isocrates laid down the model of the liberal arts as civic arts – as the tools enabling upper-class leaders “to prepare themselves for service to the city” as a whole, not just for the benefit of their own class.

Isocrates wrestled as well with a problem first raised by the Sophists. Persuasion requires a different mode of thinking from that involved in acquiring exact knowledge. We don’t normally say that we “persuade” people that two and two equals four, or that water freezes at such and such a temperature. We reserve the notion of persuasion for getting people to *act* in certain ways or to *do* something. That sort of thinking, unlike knowing exactly, is dependent on particular circumstances as well as on our past experience in the matter at hand. We call it *prudentia*.

Isocrates' second major contribution was to establish *firmly and explicitly* the alliance between rhetoric and *prudentia* as its appropriate mode of thinking. His influence, exercised through Cicero, is long-term: for the remainder of antiquity and the early modern period down to the 19th century CE, oratorical rhetoric as the "delivery vehicle" for *prudentia* would dominate higher education to the virtual exclusion of the mode prevailing in higher education today – that of scientific knowing. **Isocrates believed problems of knowing subordinate to problems of living. To put it another way: he believed that thinking about how to live was a more vital use of the human intellect than the discovery of facts.**

But consider the following implication: **If you acknowledge the role of *prudentia* in human life, and if you choose to restore it to a larger role in today's college curriculum, you're obliged to redefine the liberal arts to include rhetoric, given its natural affinity with *prudentia*.** We did precisely that towards the end of our Chapter 2 above.

Such an alliance between rhetoric and *prudentia* sets the stage for Aristotle, who provides the rationale for the liberal arts as "crafts" that include rhetoric. Aristotle's most important contribution was to distinguish between three different good habits of mind: We can think for the sake of knowing exactly ("science"), think for the sake of making ("craft" or "art"), or think reliably for the sake of acting or doing (*prudentia*).

These distinctions become crucial in tracing the career of the liberal arts of language from ancient Athens to the present. The liberal arts began as three separate "crafts" -- rhetoric, argument, and "grammar" -- applying to *any* subject matter, and schooling was organized in that triad throughout antiquity. Their ancient purpose? As vehicles for *prudentia*.

In the Italian Renaissance these crafts were split into specific "subject matters" joined by still other, new "subject matters" for instruction and scholarly investigation, each in its own right, no longer devoted exclusively to thinking for the sake of doing (*prudentia*). Then in the late 19th century what we've called "subject matters" became "disciplines" proper, devoted solely to thinking for the sake of knowing exactly and festooned with all the trappings we take for granted today – advanced degrees, professional associations, and the like.

One final point about Classical Athens. Ask someone today what "the liberal arts" consist of, and the answer probably will be that they pertain solely to non-technical, non-professional subjects. So people say, "Oh, I didn't major in engineering, architecture, or nutrition; I took a liberal arts degree."

Nothing could be further from the way we four authors – and the ancient Athenians or Romans of the late republic – understand the liberal arts.

Classical Athenians and late republican Romans saw them as three crafts of speech applying to *any* issue, no matter how complicated or technological, that entered the purview of citizens in a democracy or republic.

From their outset the liberal arts as civic arts impelled citizens into complicated deliberations. And if that was true in ancient Athens or Rome, think how much more pressingly true it is today. **Far more of the public issues we now confront are created by new technologies - in healthcare, the environment, or reproductive technology, just to name a few. And once you jettison the current discipline-bound definition of the liberal arts - as have we - the nature and complexity of issues facing citizens ceases to be decisive. Now the sole criterion becomes, "Does this issue bear on our lives with sufficient urgency or importance to require the exercise of *prudencia* by citizens trained in the arts of rhetorical judgment?"**

Athenian democrats and Roman republicans refused to retreat from pressing issues by resorting to the liberal arts as mere tools for polite conversation. Can we afford to retreat today?

The Civic Arts Suppressed (322 BCE-End of Antiquity)

The liberal arts as civic arts qualify as the most durable legacy of Classical Athenian democracy. But maintaining a democracy in an agrarian world is like growing orchids in a desert - an expensive proposition.

At Athens the cost was calculated in the arithmetic of human freedom. In a world where upwards of nine people must work to get the food out of the ground (or off the fig tree or vine) to feed ten, how could so many Athenians take off for so long to attend the Council or Assembly or sit on the jury courts? Free wage-labor, especially in agriculture, remained uncommon in the Greco-Roman world throughout antiquity. *If you wanted to free thousands of Athenians for democratic activity, you had to lock thousands of others into the most acute form of unfreedom, chattel slavery.*

The historical record of the long agrarian era between hunting and gathering societies and industrial societies shows that the cost in human terms proved *too* great. Only in a relatively small number of Greek city-states, for a brief interval, was a voice in their own affairs and access to due process so widely available to citizens up and down the social spectrum. The normal pre-industrial pattern is for a single ruler or a small oligarchy of landowners to monopolize political power, wealth, and prestige.

That's the pattern we find throughout the Hellenistic (323-31 BCE) and Roman

periods to the end of antiquity. We'll glance at political institutions after 323 BCE and their implications for the liberal arts. Then we'll double back and devote a final section on antiquity to that extraordinary period in the late Roman republic between the Gracchi brothers (133 BCE and afterwards) and Cicero's murder (43 BCE). Cicero practiced the liberal arts as civic arts with such distinction that later Europeans and Americans modeled their practice on his.

First, then, a look at the political transformation in the Greek east after Alexander of Macedon's death in 323 BCE. Alexander conquered Asia Minor and left in his wake three large kingdoms ruled by his Macedonian successors. In the late 200's BCE the Romans began their conquest of the east, culminating with Egypt in 30 BCE. In the eastern Mediterranean Alexander created a multitude of new cities occupied by a Greek and Macedonian elite and native inhabitants. For the rest of antiquity each of these cities remained a self-governing oligarchy within a Macedonian kingdom and later a Roman province. The older democratic city-states such as Athens drifted into insignificance in this world of large power-players or were transformed into oligarchies.

How did these political developments affect higher education? Between 323 and 100 BCE higher schooling took the form it would retain till antiquity's end, remaining city-based, private, fee-paying, and confined to students from wealthy backgrounds; many played roles in Roman municipal or provincial administration. In the later Roman empire, schooling also could earn aspirants from outside the propertied class a place in the ever-expanding imperial bureaucracy.

We have a great deal of evidence for the state of the liberal arts in general and rhetoric in particular in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Genuine political deliberation became less and less likely; access to due legal process for ordinary people evaporated. As early as the second century BCE Greek schools of rhetoric had developed a taste for paradox and fantasy, and in the later Roman empire this trend accelerated. Later emperors interfered more directly and often in city affairs. And the more imperial intrusion increased, the more politically impotent became the local ruling class and the more esoteric their rhetorical education. Today's Americans should recognize the pattern: the more powerless citizens feel and the more politically inert they become, the more they respond to "Survivor" and "The Bachelor."

If asked about their educational goal, late Roman rhetoricians would have echoed Isocrates' aim of preparing citizen orators to lead their cities. But what late Roman students actually absorbed were cultural frills that stamped them with the identical seal of genteel refinement. **If we compare the education**

in late Roman Antioch, for example, with that offered by the Sophists or Isocrates in democratic Athens, we realize that the liberal arts degenerate when they cease to be civic arts – when, in other words, they no longer prepare leaders to look beyond their own class in governing.

The Civic Arts Briefly Revived in the Later Roman Republic (133-43 BCE)

Our founding fathers sought to activate citizenship by appeals to antiquity, not to Athenian democracy but to the late Roman republic, in particular its oratory, and even more particularly the speeches of Cicero.

Prior to Cicero's birth in 106 BCE Rome had acquired an enormous empire under the leadership of an upper, "senatorial" class to whom the benefits of empire flowed. Then in 133 BCE Tiberius Gracchus, one of these senators, launched a program of land reform that shredded the upper class's unity and led to his murder by fellow senators. His younger brother Gaius Gracchus sponsored further reforms that got him killed as well.

These two inventors of the Roman "civic arts" were followed by a series of upper-class warlords. Winning the allegiance of their soldiers, they put their own interests above those of either Senate or people and pitched the late republic into chaos until Julius Caesar imposed one-man rule in 49 BCE. Caesar's assassination sparked a violent competition between warlords that ended with the young Octavian's victory over Mark Anthony at Actium in 31 BCE. In 27 BCE Octavian sealed the end of the Roman republic by becoming Augustus, sole ruler of what we know as the Roman empire. In that autocracy the liberal arts as civic arts were dead.

Marcus Tullius Cicero lived through the death throes of the republic at the center of events. Intimately involved in its politics, he was driven into exile in 56 BCE and finally tracked down and murdered by Mark Anthony's henchmen in 43 BCE. In his theoretical works Cicero affirms that those with the most wealth and best education should have the deciding vote in republican politics, but that leaves open the question: should they exercise that vote *in their own interests alone*, without regard for the interests of the Roman masses? To put the question another way: In his oratorical treatises Cicero defines a liberal arts education for generations of early modern Europeans and Americans. *Was he also a champion of the liberal arts as civic arts?*

It's best to examine first Cicero's practice rather than his precepts. His performance as a public orator earned him rock star status. Let's therefore consider his performance in the three settings available for public oratory at Rome.

By far the best known is the Senate. Cicero's Senate orations, delivered in an enclosed space to a quorum of at least several hundred of his own class, tell us less about him as a civic artist than do his speeches in two other settings.

The first was the Standing Criminal Court. Cicero began his career as an orator for the defense in these courts at age 25. The defendants in these cases surpassed O.J. Simpson in notoriety, attracting thousands to their open-air trials. Unconstrained by today's rules of evidence, Cicero pulled out all the stops and provided first-class theater. Here he first came to the attention the Roman crowd. In plea after plea, says one expert on the Rome of Cicero's day, he made a point of "appealing to the good of the Roman people as a whole."

Most revealing for a civic arts stance were Cicero's twenty one speeches before the mass public meetings prior to sessions of the popular assemblies. The two main assemblies elected Rome's higher magistrates and enacted Rome's laws. Presided over by upper-class magistrates, both forums were for voting, *not* for discussion or debate. Although each assembly voted by groups, not by individuals, both nonetheless were examples of *direct* political decision-making by the Roman people at large, not the *indirect* participation favored by our founding fathers. The opportunity for discussion and debate came in the mass meetings held before votes in the popular assemblies.

Cicero denigrated the Roman crowd in private correspondence, but he and his fellow aristocrats realized that they had to earn its approval at these open-air meetings. *His very appearance before these meetings endorsed the principle of popular sovereignty. Cicero never doubted that the Roman republic's reach included the prerogatives of its ordinary citizens, even if he wanted to deny them its leadership.* In his very first speech to the Senate he argued that the people's authority was as great as that of the Senate. And in political treatises he defended the authority of the people and their official advocates, the Tribunes.

An even more fundamental rationale appears in his greatest oratorical treatise, *De oratore*. When it comes to effective public speaking, wrote Cicero, "the uneducated masses" can "render good judgments about what is right and what is wrong in matters of art and proportion . . . [because] that capacity is rooted in the sense they all possess, for nature has decreed that no one is entirely devoid of that."

Cicero the civic artist thus closes the ancient chapter on the liberal arts as civic arts first espoused in the 400's BCE by Pericles in his famous "Funeral Oration" and Protagoras in the passage quoted earlier. Protagoras, you recall, had claimed that "both blacksmith and cobbler" were "competent to offer advice on matters political." In a speech entitled *pro Flacco* Cicero derided the *major*

role of cobblers and their ilk in the few remaining Greek democratic assemblies of his own day. But he nonetheless was committed to reserving a role for the Roman masses. Why? **Because both Protagoras and Cicero credited the citizens of Athens and Rome with the capacity for *prudentia*.**

In spite of living through a prolonged bloodbath, Cicero never ceased to devote himself to civic activity. Rhetoric he wrote about with a distinction equaled only by that of Aristotle, but unlike Aristotle Cicero focused much more on civic practice than on theory. Philosophy too he wrote about with a distinction unequalled by any Roman, but primarily as a means for sustaining those in public life. His voluminous private correspondence is full of his constant preoccupation with politics. And he himself regarded his own political career as the most important aspect of his life. But posterity has disagreed, assigning Cicero a far larger role. **For early modern Europeans and our own founders Cicero became the foremost ancient practitioner of the liberal arts as civic arts.**

The Revival of the Liberal Arts and their Eclipse as Civic Arts in Italy (1350-1500 CE) and in Tudor and Stuart Britain (1500-1700 CE)

How did the ancient Greco-Roman liberal arts become so intertwined with secondary education in Italy and higher education in the rest of Early Modern Europe?

After 1300 CE certain Italian city-states used their independence to prosper in business and flourish culturally. They claimed to revive ancient Roman political and educational practices. Their politics they called “republican”; their culture, “humanism.” In the 1400’s the tiny, business-minded Florentine upper-class paid good money to humanist tutors to teach Cicero to their children, filled their libraries with humanist books, and adorned their palaces with high-priced antiques, real and fake.

By 1500 humanism had crossed the Alps. By 1600 you couldn’t find work in northern Europe as a school teacher or public official without humanist credentials. Later the liberal arts in their humanist guise traversed the Atlantic to become the model for American higher education.

All the above-mentioned humanists were Christians. Indeed, all of Europe was Christian. Yet pagan texts, those by Cicero above all, far outnumbered Christian texts in the upper-level schooling received by Europe’s non-clerical elites from 1400 to 1800 CE.

We’ve chosen Florence in the early 1400’s and Britain in the Tudor and Stuart periods (roughly 1500-1700 CE) to illustrate the eclipse of the liberal arts as civic arts in Early Modern Europe. The eminent French scholar Marc Fumaroli

called the European Renaissance the *aetas ciceroniana*, “the Age of Cicero.” **We regret to report that in light of recent scholarship the claim rings false at five levels.**

At the level of *social structure*: We explained at this chapter’s outset that the liberal arts can’t qualify as civic arts unless a voice in the public decisions that affect one extends well down the socio-economic spectrum. When Cicero addressed mass meetings of ordinary Romans prior to their popular assemblies, he endorsed the liberal arts as civic arts. **But fewer than 6% of the populace had the right to vote and hence a voice in politics in Florence of the 1400’s or in Tudor and Stuart Britain, so this revival of the ancient Roman liberal arts in either site can’t begin to qualify as “civic arts.”**

At the *political* level: By Cicero’s day the ties of dependence that once bound the lower orders to prominent Romans had broken down. Not so in Renaissance Florence: Its upper class continued to exercise power through patronage extended to the lower orders. A similar system of patronage and dependency bound England’s nobility, gentry, and wealthy burghers – the only element with a political voice – to its Tudor and Stuart monarchs until the mid-17th century CE.

At the level of *schooling*: For Cicero schooling in the liberal arts provided not only rhetorical weapons for deployment in various judicial and political forums; he also endorsed rhetoric as the foundation for ethical excellence and political savvy. Recent scholarship has stripped these three benefits from Renaissance and later English schooling, which we now know was confined to skills with the Latin language.

As for the *rationale behind schooling*: Cicero and his class received the benefits of liberal arts schooling in a foreign tongue (Greek) much as college graduates today would pursue an M.B.A. or law degree, in order to pursue Cicero’s twin vocations of law and politics, *not* to reinforce his upper-class status, which he took for granted. The Italian elite of the 1400’s CE and the Tudor-Stuart elite acquired Latin learning for a different purpose -- as a marker of rank, the emblem of *gentility*. In both its Italian and English contexts the term “gentleman” acquired a self-conscious, widely-heralded patina.

Most important for later European and early American history is the *ideological role* played by the early modern liberal arts. For Cicero the liberal arts were instruments of debate. Hard-headed Florentine and later English elites on the other hand endorsed a purely philological education because it provided such a comely mask for the often unseemly exercise of raw political power. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine in the 1980’s applied the perfect term to this mismatch between practice and ideal – the “mystification” of the liberal arts.

Historical Appendix 2

The American Career of the Liberal Arts as Civic Arts

Part 1: Pre-Civil War America

(by J. Kuykendall)

America's Colonial Colleges

When England made its somewhat belated entry into the European colonial effort in the New World, tensions in the environment at home -- Crown versus Parliament, Established Church versus Puritan Dissenters -- had their echoes in the colonies across the Atlantic. Many Protestants who had fled England during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary (1553-59) returned when her half-sister Elizabeth began her long tenure (1559-1603). Some of those who returned had been influenced during exile by the particular brand of Protestant activism personified by John Calvin in Geneva, and returned to England with the conviction that their home country had never completely "purified" itself as a Protestant Christian nation.

While Elizabeth proved sufficiently adroit to prevent these people (who came to be called Puritans) from taking control of the state church, the years of her tenure witnessed their growing influence among the English population, conveying their message of reform through use of the printing press and some measure of academic preferment at Cambridge and Oxford. As colonization began in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign and grew apace during the years of her Stuart successors, James I (1603-25) and Charles I (1603-49), many Puritans looked upon the prospect of settlement in the New World as a means of establishing a colonial "Nation of Saints" which would permit them to cleanse the existing institutions of English society with their "true" religion.

Among those institutions, of course, was the educational system; and while they lacked the resources -- and perhaps the inclination -- to replicate the English (and later Scottish) university model as a capstone to the educational system, they surely reverted to the basic collegiate pattern in founding the nine institutions of higher education which emerged during the Colonial Period. While it was never the case that any of these schools was established for the sole purpose of training clergy, a substantial number of students during the early colonial period were in fact theological students. In all events, the number of students who were enrolled was relatively small, and while the basic goals of their education were knowledge, piety, and civility, there was also the assumption (sometimes overtly stated) that the products of the colleges were to be the gentleness of colonial society.

All told, nine colleges were established in colonial America. The first three (Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale) were established with the intention of providing a home-grown colonial clergy. The next three (Princeton, King's College [later Columbia], and the College of Philadelphia [later the University of Pennsylvania]) came into existence in the context of the explosive religious revival in the colonies of the 1730s and 40s that came to be known as the [First] Great Awakening. The third cluster of three colleges (Rhode Island College [later Brown University], Dartmouth College, and Queen's College [later Rutgers University]) were founded just a few years before the outbreak of the American Revolution.

Though each of the nine colleges had its own distinctive finger print, the fact that the colonial culture was primary a derivative of life in the mother country meant that the basic collegiate pattern -- curriculum, methods of instruction, clientele, modes of student life -- was reflective of the English (and Scottish) paradigm. Each was conceived and established under particular local conditions, and each was chartered by the government of its colony. The distinction between "public" and "private" colleges as we know it did not exist, and the extent of governmental involvement in the life of each institution varied under changing circumstances.

While the overall environment in every colony became increasingly secular with passing generations after founding, the fact that religious and political leadership was typically vested in a small group of opinion makers meant that life in the colleges was somewhat removed from any expectation or encouragement to civic engagement on the part of students or faculty, and the dominant influence in the direction and governance of the colleges was typically in the hands of the clergy.

American Colleges in the Revolutionary Era

The years surrounding the American Revolution brought a very different spirit to the campuses of the colonial colleges. Indeed, a spirit of civic activism came to the forefront on each campus, albeit in different expressions, usually representative of the particular environment and population of each individual institution. Several of the most influential leaders of the Revolutionary cause -- John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, for example -- were products of American colleges, and one college president, John Witherspoon of Princeton, was a participant in the Continental Congress and thereby a signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

On a somewhat different front, there were a number of other graduates of colonial colleges who played a role in stirring the fires of revolution. Many

clergymen who had been trained at places like Princeton, Harvard and Yale were active in “preaching up a rebellion” from their pulpits. Especially in their so-called Election Sermons (sermons preached on special occasions rather than in the regular round of Sabbath service), clergymen in the colonies encouraged the patriot cause both before and during the war for independence. At least in part, they did so in a rather unconventional way: they told their congregations that the harsh vicissitudes of English rule had been visited upon them because of their infidelity and immorality. Only through penitence and renewal of faithful living could Americans hope to gain God’s providential deliverance from the oppression of the Crown. Military success and eventual independence could only be gained by spiritual renewal and amendment of life.

On the campuses themselves during the time of Revolution, spirits ran high. Many faculty members and students were quite outspoken in their political advocacy, and the majority at most colleges (William and Mary, the College of Philadelphia and King’s College were partial outliers) embraced the Patriot cause with enthusiasm. It is interesting to note that the traditional curricula and prescribed methods of instruction did not change appreciably with the coming of Revolution. What seems to have happened in most cases, though, is that the time-worn rehearsal of the writings of Greek and Roman authors began to assume a new relevance for those living in the time of revolution. Civic education was increasingly equated with advocacy of the rights of Americans. Matters which had seemed almost coincidental in the education of young men for life in the colonies became central to their interests and commitments.

As this change in focus was taking place, both faculty members and students were effectively politicized: from the 1750s on, many teachers were increasingly forthright in advocating American rights, both in and out of the classroom, and their involvement was increasingly viewed as an acceptable aspect of their behavior. The most significant aspects of the curriculum came to be classical studies, oratory, and moral philosophy, and the teachers found ample grist for the revolutionary mill in classroom readings that had been at hand for many years. Quite significant in their thinking and teaching were the works of Cicero, Virgil, Livy and others among the Romans and Homer, Isocrates, Demosthenes among the Greeks. Ideas from the Greco-Roman canon were increasingly pertinent to the environment and culture emerging in America.

Students in those years were increasingly open to faculty leadership by precept and example: they observed the political activism of many of their teachers; they listened to the political and ethical ideas of the faculty, both in formal and informal settings; and they developed a lively extracurricular

sub-structure of their own (student-organized literary/debating societies and libraries) which underscored the significance of reflection upon contemporary colonial life. During the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the military phase of the revolution, activist students worked to persuade their more conservative school-mates to “get with the program” of preparation for independence. In several instances, militias were formed, and political rhetoric ran high.

The events of 1776 and years following had profound impact upon life on the several campuses, as might be expected. The physical plants of the individual colleges were coopted for military use, often by both patriots and the British military presence at different times. Insofar as academic life was permitted to continue during wartime, curricular reforms were effected in order to support the prevailing ethos of the revolution. Instruction in political theory became much more overt, and “practical” courses (math and science, plus applied techniques such as surveying) were established in order to meet the needs of the day in the larger community. While campus life was often disrupted during the war years, there was a lively sense of obligation within the colleges to support the cause until independence was a reality.

American Colleges in the New Nation

As the long war for independence drew to a close, life on campuses of the American colleges began to return to “normal.” The sense of urgency concerning the nature and destiny of the new nation was certainly shared among the various college communities. Indeed, the realization that they were expected to produce leadership for the emerging society obliged them to assume an active role in the conversations about the political future of the country. As party spirit began to be evidenced in the national life, both curricular and extracurricular activities on campus were attuned to the issues at hand. This sense of awareness was certainly nothing new in the nine colleges that had been in existence prior to the war.

In addition, the next decades witnessed a notable proliferation of new colleges in the new nation. In some cases, the new institutions were intended to replicate the academic model of one of the existing colonial schools. Princeton, for example, was described as a mother hen surrounded by her (new college) chicks. Some of the new colleges flourished, at least relatively speaking; others foundered and disappeared. In all, however, sixteen new colleges which still exist today had been founded before the beginning of the 19th century. A number of these schools were to be found in relatively remote settings, either on the western frontier or in rural, underpopulated areas. While there was no

grand plan, it was clear that citizens in each state aspired to have at least one institution of higher learning within its bounds.

Although there were early expressions of opinion that such schools should be controlled and sponsored by the state in which they were situated (especially in the South), most of the new schools were directly related to one or another of the religious denominations which had emerged as the alternative to the older model of an established church under state oversight. Presbyterians and Congregationalists were particularly active in this regard, though virtually every denomination of consequence felt the need for its own school(s).

A primary motive force for the eagerness with which the churches undertook this and other efforts was the long-lasting era of religious revival and enthusiasm which has been labeled the Second Great Awakening. There were inklings of this trans-national phenomenon as early as the 1790s, and it lasted at least until the 1830s. The influence of the revival permeated virtually every area of life in the new nation. A major part of that influence focused upon efforts to control the social norms in the new nation as it grew. The Awakening itself has been referred to as "an organizing process" intended to establish standards for belief and behavior as the nation expanded to "the West." Participants in the Awakening were exhorted to cultivate the virtue of so-called "disinterested benevolence" in their personal lives and the activities in their communities. In a few words, this idea embodied the conviction that the individual converted to Christianity in the Awakening would endeavor to infect the rest of society with his/her particular notion of virtue. Thus every conceivable social issue -- alcohol, dueling, prostitution, literacy, slavery: you name it -- was a proper target for the curative influence of evangelical Christianity. Quite clearly the colleges were not exempt from this effort.

Whereupon, the heavy -- sometimes overbearing -- influence of religion (usually evangelical Christianity) in the establishment and maintenance of the new colleges was a major factor in a substantial shift of focus regarding what the basic educational mission was to be. Many of the new colleges felt a mandate to emphasize the religious dimension of life at the expense of the obligation to create public-spirited citizens for positions of future influence and leadership. Curricula, community standards and obligations, selection of faculty and students -- virtually every aspect of campus life was the proper arena in which the spiritual mission of the sponsoring denomination could be expressed. In the midst of all this, the focus on civic duty which permeated the colonial colleges in the era of the Revolution was largely eclipsed. Sad to say, when that sort of discourse began to be revived toward the middle of the 19th century, the issue which evoked expressions of civic engagement on the campuses was the nation-splitting matter of chattel slavery.

Part 2: Post-Civil War America (by R. Knott and D. Wood)

Late 19th Century: Transitions

The Civil War's devastation brought significant changes to American institutions of higher learning. The optimism of the American Revolution and the accompanying attempts to revitalize the Western tradition of civic republican education suffered a severe blow from an internal war that few wanted and none foresaw the effects of. One crucial effect: the war undermined the hope that colleges could produce civic-minded graduates to lead the postwar republic.

As America and American colleges sought to recover after the war, several new forces reshaping higher education also weakened the classical liberal arts culture on college campuses. The liberal or civic arts curriculum and culture of the antebellum American colleges were severely challenged by what Roger Geiger in his *History of American Higher Education* calls three "revolutions." These three transitions merged to reshape American higher education.

The first transition: A need to rebuild the American landscape after the war led collegiate educators to take a more practical approach: Congress under President Abraham Lincoln had voted to establish land-grant institutions throughout the states. Americans almost immediately appreciated the improvements to their lives wrought by this new emphasis on agriculture and engineering. Universities focused on such pursuits now appeared throughout the country.

The second transition: Accompanying the turn toward applied knowledge was the influence of the European (particularly German) universities. Following their example, Americans professionalized the academic disciplines with an emphasis on research that generated new knowledge. There appeared for the first time departmental divisions within the universities accompanied by a credentialing process emphasizing graduate programs and degrees.

Recall that ancient Greeks and Romans invented the liberal arts as skills of persuasive argument applicable to *any* subject matter. But after Civil War the liberal arts, newly relegated to departments within the institutions, became separate academic disciplines confined primarily to the humanities. College and university professors immersed themselves in the narrowed pursuits of these disciplines, relieved to be released from their responsibilities as monitors of student conduct and character development.

Thus did a third transitional force appear in the form of a revolution in the collegiate culture. Students ceased to see their professors as mentors in the civic arts and focused instead on intense competition in extra-curricular activities. These now replaced the examples set by teachers as the way in which character and leadership could be cultivated. Athletic competition, at first intramural and then intercollegiate, came to play a much larger role in students' lives. The same element of competition also spilled over into collegiate debating societies.

And just as formal credentialing changed faculty culture, so students too began to value highly the sort of certification offered, for example, by athletic letters of achievement. The social Darwinism prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries undergirded this strong competitive strain in the student subculture. At the undergraduate level, strictly academic pursuits and the accompanying courses often amounted to little more than the achievement of the "gentleman's C."

Thus were moved to the margins of college and university life the emphases on character, prudentia, and the civic arts of the American Revolutionary era. Denominational colleges, rapidly expanding in number and geographical reach during the mid-19th century, still stressed piety and the Christian virtues of character. But the Protestant Reformation had separated the domain of the sacred from the secular. The result: denominational colleges still saw cultivation of the Christian virtues as central to their mission. But those virtues were now largely divorced from the civic or classical liberal arts.

20th Century: Transitions Solidified

Above we described three major transitions in late 19th century colleges and universities – transitions to practical knowledge, advanced professional disciplinary research and student majors, and character development relegated to student-run collegiate pursuits. These three developments dominated higher education throughout the 20th century as well. The distinctly American university with its blend of advanced and practical studies became the preferred instrument to achieve mass higher education. Various reformers tried to re-emphasize the liberal or civic arts, but such efforts were mostly short-lived.

The influence of graduate and practical education couldn't be avoided even on the campuses of small liberal arts colleges. Colleges adopted the highly successful disciplinary structure and practical focus of the university. The number of new, separate subjects increased; the literary and debate societies gradually faded from a central place in the collegiate subculture,

replaced by fraternities and sororities; and the highly-treasured residential experience gradually gave way to students' preference for off-campus housing. Intercollegiate athletic competitions became mass spectacles. Indeed, many 20th century colleges and universities celebrated their reputations for athletic achievement as a central feature of their identity.

Student "activities" expanded, and with it the professionalization of "programmed" interaction among the young on campuses. A multitude of professionally-credentialed specialists took over co-curricular programs for students. (Examples include residence life directors, Greek life directors, multicultural activities directors, career services counselors, wellness counselors . . . the list goes on, all with their assistants in each area.) The number of such careerists expanded prodigiously from the 1960s, frequently replacing faculty in the role of mentor and advisor.

Serious attempts to establish a college-wide culture dedicated to the civic arts declined, pushed aside by the practical and professional contributions pioneered by American universities. Just to remind ourselves what the civic arts entailed: they stressed the virtues of character, *prudentia* (ethical and civic good sense), and the linguistic skills required for listening well before responding persuasively. The goal was to produce students dedicated to civic activity in the communities they entered as graduates.

Faculty who still maintained an interest in broadening the educational experiences of their students generated a General Education movement, eventually relegated to distribution requirements in the first two years of undergraduate study - the victim of disciplinary pressure from various academic departments.

After 1945 pressures increased to expand higher education to ever larger segments of the American public. The University model adapted well to such pressures. Frontier and denominational colleges were soon challenged by the spread of land-grant universities throughout the South, Midwest, and West Coast. Student enrollments surged in public universities, whereas enrollments in the private liberal arts colleges stagnated.

Three pressures pushed liberal arts colleges towards mimicking the structure and culture of the university: The latter obviously contributed to society's practical needs; its media-friendly athletic programs magnified its public visibility; and its lower tuition forced private colleges to compete financially. Faculty at small colleges came to see themselves as like their counterparts at the big schools - as specialists in academic disciplines and members of academic departments, not as fellow-citizens of the well-knit communities that American colleges once had been.

So restoring a civic republican culture remained largely at the fringe of these colleges' mission. A few schools turned for inspiration to the great books of Western civilization. But without the campus-wide nurturing of civic virtues, these books failed to foster habits of character essential to the cultivation of *prudentia* and the arts of civil public discourse.

Such discourse undergirds the democratic processes critical to our well-being at the local, state, and national levels. The founders of our Republic not only would be distressed at the shrill tone of current public speech; they also would be disconcerted, we think, by the near-disappearance of campus cultures as small republics dedicated to the cultivation of civic leaders.

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