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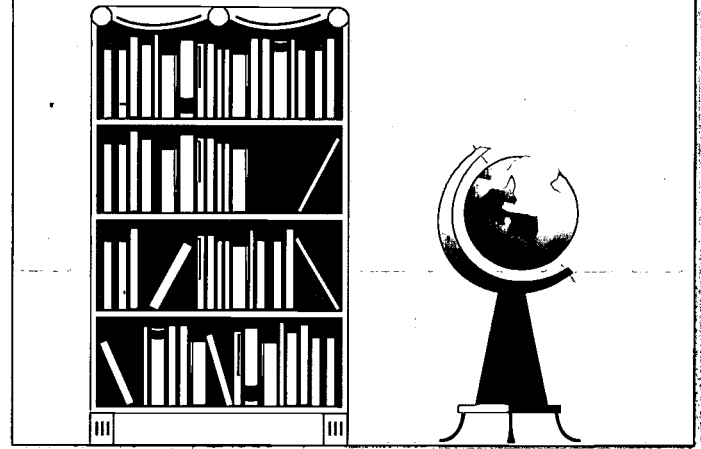
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ABSTRACT

The state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts across the United States, are suffering from a general erosion of academic standards and a radical politicization of the undergraduate curriculum. An important dimension of this problem is the effect on K-12 education in Michigan. Poor student performance and poor teacher preparation are directly related. There are many reasons for the decline in academic standards, including the disintegration of an effective core curriculum and the pervasiveness of trendy, politically correct courses, as well as declining standards of instruction in reading and writing skills and a gap between what students are taught and what they really need to know. Emphasizing basic skills has been characterized as elitist or as discrimination against ethnic minorities, and teacher education courses frequently focus on the trivial. In some states, the problem of the "dumbed-down university" is being addressed, and Michigan could learn from these efforts. Recommendations are made for improving undergraduate education at Michigan's public universities. These center on reinstating sound instruction in English composition and adopting a core curriculum so that every student in the Michigan state universities undergoes the same essential training and gains exposure to common, high-level material in the arts and sciences. Some supplemental essays are included: (1) "Affirmative Action and Racial Preference at the University of Michigan" (Carl Cohen); (2) "Mathematics in the Postmodernist Era" (Arthur T. White); (3) "Undergraduate Engineering at the University of Michigan" (John A. Clark); (4) "What I Learned at the School of Education" (Andrew Titus); and (5) "Memory and Expectation: Language and Literature at Hillsdale College" (John S. Reist). Appendixes discuss what critics and postmodern professors say about higher education. (Contains 169 endnotes.) (SLD)

February 1997



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A Mackinac Center Report

Declining Standards at Michigan Public Universities

Second Edition

Thomas F. Bertonneau

With a Foreword by
Robert A. Lutz

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Declining Standards at Michigan Public Universities

How Changes in Curricula and Teaching Affect Academic Achievement, Career Preparation, and K-12 Education

Second Edition

by Thomas F. Bertonneau

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Declining Standards at Michigan Public Universities



Robert A. Lutz

Foreword

Education and business have taken their knocks in the past decade. Listening to the customer has changed the way America does business. Education establishments need to look at their “products” and the reactions to those products by their customers. This manuscript lays out one piece of the challenge: the relationship of higher education to productivity in America.

Higher education directly affects business competitiveness. How well or how poorly the professors of higher learning do their job greatly affects the success of our economy in the global market. This Mackinac Center for Public Policy study recommends some steps that would energize and strengthen our collegiate curricula.

Today, too many smart students are receiving a watered-down higher education. Colleges and universities need to re-evaluate their course offerings, do away with classes based on frivolous theory, and discard curricula that have no relationship to the challenges of the real world.

Dr. Tom Bertonneau presents well-reasoned recommendations that would lead to an intellectually sound collegiate undergraduate curriculum. American colleges and universities need to launch a renaissance in higher education. There are essential things we must all know and believe, or we do not have a common culture.

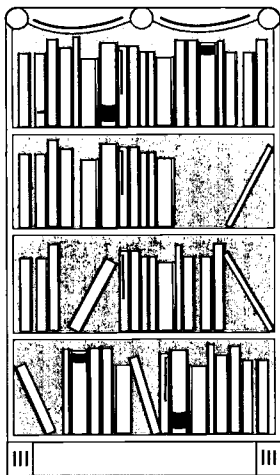
My hope is that this study will provide impetus for a major rebuilding of social responsibility within our colleges and universities.

Robert A. Lutz
President and Chief Operating Officer
Chrysler Corporation
Auburn Hills, Michigan

October 1996

Declining Standards at Michigan Public Universities

by Thomas F. Bertonneau



Executive Summary

The state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts across the nation, are suffering from a general erosion of academic standards and a radical politicization of the undergraduate curriculum. The traditional core curriculum which guaranteed that all graduating students shared in the same body of knowledge and enjoyed the same competence in cognitive skills—that they would possess what was called a *liberal education* of the type regarded as essential to a healthy civic arena—is in tatters.

An important dimension of this overall problem is its effect on K-12 education in Michigan. Poor student performance and poor teacher preparation are directly related. Too many university graduates lack basic verbal and cognitive abilities. The reasons are disturbing: the disintegration of an effective core curriculum; the pervasiveness of trendy, politically correct courses that stress indoctrination over genuine learning; the declining standards of instruction in writing and reasoning skills; and a growing gap between what students are taught and what they must know to succeed as teachers or other professionals.

In *Recruiting Trends 1994-95: A Study of Businesses, Industries, and Governmental Agencies Employing New College Graduates*, Michigan State University Professor L. Patrick Scheetz reported findings from a survey of hundreds of firms, including many based in Michigan. He found that the ability to think critically, speak effectively, and negotiate skillfully is highly valued in a potential employee, but businesses are rarely finding graduates so equipped. “Employers,” writes Scheetz, “believe college graduates are receiving degrees in academic majors with low market value.”

Most college graduates more than forty years old will recall taking freshman English composition. That’s the course in which they learned the fundamentals of written exposition, including a review of grammar and syntax and some lessons in informal logic and the rules of evidence. A tedious but valuable course, freshman composition once sharpened universally applicable skills that helped students deal with future courses and careers. But at our state universities today, much of what passes for freshman composition is trivial and irrelevant, or worse. Heather Mac Donald writes in *The Public Interest*, “The only thing composition

teachers are not talking and writing about these days is how to teach students to compose clear, logical prose.”

Course syllabi and related materials from English departments and writing programs throughout Michigan’s universities reveal a general lowering—and in some cases, an abandonment—of standards of correct writing. Self-expression and moral liberation (the “anything goes” approach) are often emphasized over prose competency. Consider this professor’s advice from a freshman composition course syllabus at Eastern Michigan University: “Don’t worry about writing perfect papers. I do not have a set standard for what I consider ‘good writing.’”

A survey of the master syllabi for freshman composition at the state’s universities reveals the dominance of what one University of Michigan professor terms “the myth of basic skills.” According to this notion, there is no connection between explicit instruction in grammar and syntax on one hand, and the communication competency of students on the other. Emphasizing basic skills is characterized as “elitist,” or as an exercise in “discrimination” against ethnic minorities, or as a manifestation of an “oppressive” economic system.

Dr. Peter T. Koper, associate professor of English at Central Michigan University, dissents from this prevailing orthodoxy. He sees these trends as inherently divisive. In Koper’s view, “Grammar is not elitist. It is, rather, quintessentially democratizing, the ability to use Standard Written English being the condition for participating in public life in this country and in much of the rest of the world.”

A preference for trivia is also part of the problem in today’s teacher education courses. The curricula offered by university education departments are heavy on fuzzy “self-awareness,” “multicultural,” and other faddish or politicized material, and light on the hard knowledge of the subjects that teachers must eventually teach. One assignment, offered as a model to teaching assistants at CMU, asked students to watch and discuss TV talk shows like *Oprah* and *Montel* for two weeks of a fifteen-week semester.

Foreign language instruction is another casualty of current intellectual fashions at the universities. Knowing another language is often the first step in appreciating the society represented by that language. But today’s foreign language requirements are minimal and foreign language studies are falling prey to the same distortions that have rendered freshman composition nonfunctional. Courses that devote inordinate time to the lives and lifestyles of contemporary counterculture figures are an example.

Rigorous content in the traditional liberal arts has disintegrated in favor of cultivating emotions and politically correct opinions. The result is a huge disservice to young, prospective teachers who invest money and years to prepare for the classroom but are instead diverted into shallow, unproductive and even irrelevant course work. The poor performance of Michigan teachers on accreditation exams should come as no surprise; based on what the current system subjects them to, we could hardly expect a different outcome. This report illustrates that the distortions and diversions afflicting teacher preparation are mirrored throughout much of the undergraduate curriculum at the universities.

In a number of other states, the problem of the “dumbed-down university” has already been recognized and a few people have begun to deal with it. Michigan can learn from these experiences. Wisconsin, for example, is reviving the study of “great books” of Western

“The only thing composition teachers are not talking and writing about these days is how to teach students to compose clear, logical prose.”

The catalogs of the universities of Michigan contain hundreds of trendy, trivial, and politicized courses, many of which should be replaced with courses more in line with the carefully focused liberal arts curriculum that once prevailed and served Michigan citizens well.

civilization. Boston and Columbia Universities now integrate a challenging reading list with their composition instruction, recognizing the traditional link between knowledge and the ability to express oneself.

Incorporated into this report are several short but important essays by other individuals: Carl Cohen of the University of Michigan on affirmative action and racial preferences; Arthur T. White of Western Michigan University on developments in mathematics education; John A. Clark of the University of Michigan on the evolution of the academic calendar; John S. Reist of Hillsdale College on how the teaching of language and literature at Hillsdale College differs from that in state universities; and Andrew Titus, a recent graduate of Central Michigan University, on his experiences with CMU's curriculum for aspiring teachers.

This report concludes with recommendations for improving undergraduate education at Michigan's state institutions of higher learning. Among the recommendations are these:

- 1. English composition teaching needs to be rescued from counterproductive and heavily politicized theories imposed by "experts" whose claims flout empirical evidence. Only by acknowledging the deficiencies and tackling them head-on can we make real progress toward the goal of a well-educated citizenry. Let the discussion begin!
- 2. The catalogs of the universities of Michigan contain hundreds of trendy, trivial, and politicized courses, many of which should be replaced with courses more in line with the carefully focused liberal arts curriculum that once prevailed and served Michigan citizens well.
- 3. Every campus of the state universities in Michigan needs a rigorous and accessible great books program.
- 4. Alternative accreditation of English departments, writing programs, and other humanities departments and programs should be instituted.
- 5. Employers and alumni groups should become critically involved in the oversight of the universities.
- 6. The rules and regulations against political indoctrination in the classroom should be vigilantly observed and rigorously enforced.
- 7. The universities should work toward the adoption of an all-campus undergraduate core curriculum so that every student undergoes essential liberal arts education.

Declining Standards at Michigan Public Universities

■ by Thomas F. Bertonneau

Introduction

The story of higher education in Michigan is beginning to resemble Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*: The naked truth is that much of the public's money is being spent unwisely. Taxpayers, fee-payers, parents, and students are not getting the best return on their investment.¹ The return that they should expect—well educated graduates with lots of general knowledge in addition to their specialized training—is less and less in evidence. The erosion of the curriculum which lies at the root of this decline meanwhile goes unchecked because our public colleges and universities are shielded from the discipline of market forces. Increasingly, fanciful and ineffective theories of instruction have become dominant, producing a greater number of students with less knowledge and fewer skills than ever before. Regardless of performance, however, the state universities of Michigan have a nearly guaranteed revenue stream from Lansing, year after year. As two researchers recently discovered, spending on the state universities of Michigan in the last decade has increased four times as fast as enrollment.² This disparity is a sign that Michigan's public universities are becoming top-heavy with expensive bureaucrats and faculty who teach our students little of real value, especially in the humanities.

These and related problems raise important questions of fiscal and educational responsibility. What do students, taxpayers, fee-payers, and the public have a right to expect of administrators and educators at Michigan's fifteen public universities? After all, the state is spending more than \$1.3 billion in tax money per year to support some 200,000 students.³ Alumni, foundations, and corporations are contributing many additional millions of dollars: In the 1994-95 academic year, private gifts to the University of Michigan totaled almost \$150 million; to Michigan State University, about \$50 million.⁴

The public has already raised questions of fiscal and educational responsibility about Michigan's public elementary and secondary schools. That our K-12 education system needs to be more accountable to constituents is now taken for granted by many. But in the debate over public education, little or no attention has yet been paid to higher education.

This report concerns the intellectual integrity of the undergraduate core curriculum in the state universities of Michigan. A core curriculum is the set of courses deemed essential which all students must take regardless of their major. The core curriculum has traditionally been the foundation of what is called a *liberal education* shared by all graduates. The core curriculum was commonly taken even by those earning degrees in technical subjects. In its study of *The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*, the National Association of Scholars has documented a nationwide phenomenon that America's "academic institutions are no longer as constitutionally well equipped as were their predecessors to define a unified vision

Increasingly, fanciful and ineffective theories of instruction have become dominant, producing a greater number of students with less knowledge and fewer skills than ever before.

*Are graduates of
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professional world?*

of the essentials of undergraduate education.”⁵ A state-focused study made by the Empire Foundation of the State University of New York (SUNY) system, issued in August 1996, came to the same conclusion about higher education there.⁶ The state universities of Michigan have unfortunately not escaped from this decline of standards.

This report is outlined as follows:

- **Chapter I, “The Evidence in the Marketplace.”** This chapter reviews documentary information about the present outcome of general undergraduate instruction in the state universities of Michigan. Are graduates of the state universities learning the basic verbal and cognitive skills required by today’s professional world? Do they possess sufficient knowledge to exercise good citizenship?
- **Chapter II, “The Decomposition of English Composition.”** This chapter reviews developments in the field of college-level writing instruction and discusses the ways in which college students have traditionally learned to master the use of sophisticated language. Is there a relation between the verbal achievements of college students and the way in which they are taught to approach writing?
- **Chapter III, “Foreign Language Follies.”** This chapter examines the current state of foreign language instruction in the state universities of Michigan. What is the traditional function of foreign language instruction in the undergraduate curriculum? What do employers say about the importance of knowing a foreign language? Do emergent approaches to foreign language instruction achieve what traditional approaches achieved?
- **Chapter IV, “The Coreless, Canonless Curriculum.”** This chapter shows how the premises of contemporary writing instruction have become the premises of liberal arts instruction generally. It also discusses the meaning of the phrase, core curriculum. Does a core curriculum exist in the state universities of Michigan as they are currently constituted? Do all students receive a similar, rigorous, general education during their undergraduate careers? What conclusions have been reached by recent external observers of the Michigan undergraduate curriculum?
- **Chapter V, “Teacher Training Fails to Make the Grade.”** This chapter turns to teacher training and examines the way in which the state universities of Michigan train teachers. What is the relation between the undergraduate core curriculum and teacher training? What is the content of specialized teacher-training courses? What have external observers said about teacher training in the state universities of Michigan?
- **Chapter VI, “Sifting a Learnt Tradition.”** This chapter briefly explores the ways in which a liberal education should be defined. What is the relation between education and tradition? What distinguishes the Western tradition from other traditions? What do students need to know?

- **Chapter VII, “A Few Encouraging Signs.”** This chapter surveys events and ideas from Michigan and elsewhere which provide clear models for insuring that all undergraduates receive the same excellent experience of a liberal education. What do these events and ideas tell us about the nature of college-level education? What does their reception tell us about the self-image of the modern state university?
- **Chapter VIII, “Recommendations and Conclusion.”** This chapter lists eleven steps which, if taken, would begin to rectify significant faults of the existing system of state-sponsored undergraduate education in Michigan. It answers the question, what can we do to make undergraduate education in the state universities of Michigan better?

Five supplementary essays appear at the end of the main document. These treat areas of the curriculum that the primary author has not addressed.

A set of appendices concludes the report. This gathers statements made by recent critics of American higher education and juxtaposes them with statements made by advocates of a *postmodern* curriculum. (For the definition of *postmodern*, see below.)

The report’s thesis is that the state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts across the nation, have suffered from the intellectual downgrading and politicization of the curriculum. The traditional core curriculum which helped guarantee that all graduating students would share in the same body of knowledge and enjoy the same competence in cognitive skills—that they would possess what used to be called a *liberal education* of the type regarded as essential to a healthy civic arena—has been destroyed. The National Association of Scholars’ recent report⁷ makes the same assessment nationwide, using the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as one of its prominent cases.

The major premise throughout the report is that, where it concerns tax-supported institutions like the state universities, the citizens of Michigan implicitly require that such institutions be run in a responsible manner and that, at present, they are not so run. Special interests and the proponents of questionable educational theories, many of them politically motivated, dominate the existing curriculum. This constitutes a crisis. Action is needed to restore the traditional undergraduate curriculum from its current desuetude and to revive it where it has disappeared.

An important corollary is that the disappointing level of learning in Michigan’s public schools will not be rectified until the low level of learning in the state universities is rectified. Universities that graduate students deficient in knowledge and ability will not be able to supply teachers who can teach at the high level which the modern culture and marketplace will certainly demand.

The report was prepared in part by acquiring course syllabi of key courses (basic skills courses such as freshman composition and advanced composition, teacher education courses, and introductory courses for literature and history) and other official descriptions of the curriculum. Among the latter were catalogs and recent course listings from all fifteen branches of the state university system: Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Lake Superior State University, Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, Northern Michigan

Universities that graduate students deficient in knowledge and ability will not be able to supply teachers who can teach at the high level which the modern culture and marketplace will certainly demand.

University, Oakland University, Saginaw Valley State University, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), University of Michigan (Dearborn), University of Michigan (Flint), Wayne State University, and Western Michigan University. The catalogs are valuable, in the words of the authors of the NAS report cited above, "because they contain the most extensive information about degree requirements, course offerings, entrance requirements, and academic departments . . . they are the most authoritative and general formulations of institutional goals, and provide a clear statement of minimal expectations."⁸

The mass of documents included 144 individual section syllabi for freshman composition courses and another 63 for individual section syllabi of advanced composition courses. There were 57 individual course syllabi relating to teacher education courses; there were 63 individual course syllabi relating to required courses for students in teacher education programs (these included introductory courses in subjects like literature and history and specialized courses in how to teach K-12 students to read and write).⁹

Supplementing the many course syllabi were textbooks used in the courses under consideration (these included anthologies and writing guides used in freshman composition and advanced composition courses, and textbooks used in introductory and specialized teacher-training courses).

In addition, the author examined newspaper reports—many from campus newspapers—concerning developments and changes in the respective curricula of the fifteen campuses.

The author communicated with faculty and students, studied course descriptions and graduation requirements, and correlated this information with a number of empirical studies of the academic competency achievement by graduates of the four-year programs in the state universities of Michigan. Readers will note that many attributions are made anonymously. This is because internal critics of the system may fear retribution for speaking out frankly and publicly.¹⁰ This alone is a sign of the academy gone awry.

A note about endnote references: Several source documents are actual classroom materials and course syllabi compiled by the instructor(s). In cases where the documents are not dated, the endnote reference includes the date the document was acquired by the author.

The report begins with the analysis of the empirical studies mentioned above. These studies are of great value because they were undertaken for purposes quite different from those motivating this report, yet they support its thesis.

Some Key Definitions

A number of terms may require definition. Some are polemically neutral but might not be familiar to lay readers; others carry a sectarian connotation which needs to be clarified. Others come from the vocabulary of the contemporary humanities or teacher education and may not be familiar to all readers.

The terms *pedagogue*, *pedagogy* and *pedagogical* ought to come first because of their importance in defining the problems and solutions addressed in the report. A *pedagogue* is a teacher (the term is Greek); *pedagogy* refers to a method of teaching, while

pedagogical is the adjective derived from the noun. The report consistently distinguishes between *traditional* and *contemporary* pedagogies. In the controversy over how to teach college level writing, for example, the traditional pedagogy involves an explicit review of grammar and other language fundamentals, and written work, carefully graded by the teacher, in connection with in-depth reading of historically important texts. The contemporary pedagogy de-emphasizes or eliminates explicit instruction in grammar and tends to unlink writing from reading. Contemporary pedagogy in the humanities and teacher education often characterizes itself as “innovative” or “on the cutting edge.” These terms also appear occasionally in the report.

The term *core curriculum* has already been defined. It means the relatively fixed and limited number of courses that a student needs to take in order to become generally educated; it is, as it has been called, “an infusion of the whole.” A related term, *liberal education*, requires a definition on its own. *Liberal education* refers to the acquisition by the student of general knowledge concerning history, literature, language, geography, anthropology, and the sciences. The purpose of a core curriculum is to foster liberal education. Liberal education gives context to the specialized education that a student receives in the courses devoted to a declared major. Under the concept of liberal education, educators are supposed to make sure that scientists understand the humanities and humanists the sciences.

Especially in the chapter on freshman composition (chapter 2), the term *grammar* is used a great deal. This term embraces not merely the technical definitions of the parts of speech or the rules for constructing sentences, but *an orderly and shared model of how to exercise reason*.

Those who dismiss grammar often do so by attempting to reduce it to a pedantic obsession. Remember that the report is, in part, an attempt to show how we should treat undergraduates in the state universities of Michigan. Teachers should never burden their students with pedantic obsessions, but they should always give them the opportunity to acquire that model of how to exercise reason. If this entails rote learning in its initial stages, teachers should not avoid imposing such tasks on students.

The report addresses what it calls *the postmodern university* and *postmodern pedagogy*. The report adopts this term because it has been adopted by many in the academy to describe their attempt to break free from traditional categories. Those who refer to themselves as postmodern often claim to have discovered that the historical values of Western civilization are arbitrary, inhibiting, even oppressive. For example, the claim of traditional pedagogy that students will do better to read Shakespeare rather than to watch soap operas would be treated by those of the postmodern persuasion as entirely *unobvious*; their counterclaim would be that soap operas might tell students just as much about life as Shakespeare. Postmodern positions such as this lie behind many of the changes made in undergraduate curricula in the last twenty years.

The report notes that certain themes, claims or positions advanced by postmodern theorists in the humanities and teacher education are *Marxist*. Precisely because it is such an inflammatory term for so many people, *Marxism* needs to be carefully defined. Marxism is not merely the idea of a centrally planned economy practiced in nations like the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, it is something much more than that.

Those who refer to themselves as postmodern often claim to have discovered that the historical values of Western civilization are arbitrary, inhibiting, even oppressive.

Both multiculturalism and diversity tend to castigate the Western tradition for its emphasis on ideas like the individual and reason, which are declared to be arbitrary and oppressive.

In essence, Marxism is an all-embracing statement about human existence which begins with three founding propositions: (1) that self-awareness is derived from entirely environmental conditions and does not exist prior to their influence; (2) that individuality is a secondary function of collective or group affiliation, so that one is a woodsman or a clergyman, a member of the elite or of the masses, before one adds a few unimportant individual traits to one's class identity; and (3) that the irreducible nature of social existence is class conflict, which pits one group against another implacably. Much of postmodern pedagogy embraces this idea of human life as class conflict.

Marxism has always presented itself as a doctrine for liberating the oppressed, but it ought to be remarked that Marxism's procedure for liberation involves the stripping away of individual traits so that one can identify with one's class. In this sense, Marxism has always been fundamentally at odds with the American—not to say the Western—idea that the individual is prior to the group. The American notion of *rights*, for example, as in our Bill of Rights, derives from the notion that rights belong inalienably to *individual persons*. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the assertion of national autonomy by its satellite nations in the late 1980s and early 1990s represented a vast popular repudiation of Marxism as a controlling vision of life.

Two additional recurring terms are linked to Marxism: *multiculturalism* and *diversity*. The former, *multiculturalism*, initially sounds positive. It recommends that, in addition to studying their own culture, society, and civilization, students need to become familiar with "other cultures." In practice, however, multiculturalism often drops the "in addition" and replaces the study of the Western tradition with the study of "other cultures." The rallying cry of multiculturalism was first heard at Stanford University in the 1980s in the form of the protesters' slogan "Hey-ho, hey-ho, Western Culture's got to go!"

Diversity is a corollary of multiculturalism. Champions of diversity often claim that the Western tradition suppresses other traditions, which must therefore be inserted into the curriculum in order to serve justice. Both multiculturalism and diversity tend to castigate the Western tradition for its emphasis on ideas like the individual and reason, which are declared to be arbitrary and oppressive. Both multiculturalism and diversity stress groups over individuals and collectivity over individuality. In this they resemble, because they derive from, Marxism.

Another important and recurring term is *theory*. Postmodern academics use this word repeatedly and everywhere and they mean by it a way of thinking superior to what most people call common sense. Theory allegedly explains that what we ordinarily believe to be true is not true at all, or even pernicious. In the study of literature, for example, the exponents of theory claim that the great plays and novels and poems of the Western tradition are the mere product of ruling-class ideology and delusion, and that it is their duty to expose the fallacies contained, say, in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Multiculturalism and diversity are thus both *theories* of human existence. So is *deconstruction*, a peculiar doctrine prevalent in today's literature departments which denies that language has any fixed meaning or that individual speakers have conscious control over their own utterances.

As we near the end of a century of worldwide ideological conflict—conflict over opposed theories of existence—it is wise to exercise a skeptical attitude toward sweeping explanations of the world that begin with the proposition that what we know is wrong.

A word on the scale and intractability of the situation: The problems afflicting basic undergraduate education in the state universities of Michigan occur together and at once. They are simultaneous, complex, overlapping and sometimes subtle. But they are nevertheless susceptible to a logical, hierarchical analysis: Some are far more fundamental than others and in this sense “come first.” Although every problem cannot be discussed instantaneously, one can study the problems sequentially and thereby demonstrate their interrelatedness.

I. The Evidence in the Marketplace

This chapter reviews the empirical evidence suggesting that graduates of American colleges and universities, including the state universities of Michigan, show poor basic skills and lack specific knowledge. This evidence tells us that something is wrong in the existing curriculum. The poor intellectual achievement of graduates is not their fault. The fault lies in the curriculum and with those who design and execute it. That thought will lead us to chapter 2 and the discussion of why students show such poor reading, writing and thinking skills.

Two recent publications in particular indicate the growing perception that college graduates are ill-prepared for today’s job market. The first, by Michigan State University Professor L. Patrick Scheetz, is *Recruiting Trends 1994-95: A Study of Businesses, Industries, and Governmental Agencies Employing New College Graduates*.¹¹ *Recruiting Trends* describes not only the success with which graduates from American universities get jobs, but employers’ satisfaction with them.¹² Among the employers responding to *Recruiting Trends*, 261 come from the north-central region of the country, which includes Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, and Nebraska. Many Michigan businesses appear in the Employer Index of the publication: Dow Corning Corporation, Empire-Detroit Steel, First Federal of Michigan, General Motors, Michigan Consolidated Gas, Michigan National Bank, and others. The information tabulated by *Recruiting Trends* may therefore be considered relevant to the state universities of Michigan.

Employers surveyed by Scheetz indicate that the ability to think critically, speak effectively, and negotiate skillfully is highly valued in a potential employee;¹³ it is at the same time an ability which they find ever more rarely. Scheetz documents the “mismatch” between the training college students receive and the skills and abilities today’s employers require.¹⁴ Those who hire new graduates indicate not only that the supply of new engineers and other technically trained graduates is inadequate, but that *not enough graduates enter the job market with the ability to write, speak, reason, and relate to others in a satisfactory manner*. In other words, these graduates have not acquired the skills traditionally associated with a “liberal arts education” centered around a meaningful “core curriculum.”

Furthermore, “new graduates expect to get too much money; they don’t want to spend time in an apprenticeship [and] they are unwilling to start at the bottom of an organization. . . . An attitude of superiority was noted too.”¹⁵ “Additionally,” writes Scheetz, “employers believe college graduates are receiving degrees in academic majors with low

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market value. Endorsed was a preferred background in common sense subjects such as mathematics, reading, composition, speech, etc. More appropriate training would be prudent," employers said.¹⁶ While a low 20.3 percent of respondents rated new college graduates as "adequately prepared" for the current job-market, "no organizations strongly agreed that new college graduates were adequately prepared for the realities of the world of work."¹⁷ *Recruiting Trends* describes college graduates who "believe [that] they are the most talented, enthusiastic, and energetic individuals ever graduated."¹⁸ This description is consistent with a 1988 U. S. Department of Education survey which found that American students consistently rated themselves as well-educated in all subjects, while consistently scoring lower on assessment exams than their foreign counterparts.¹⁹

The second publication is *Learning by Degrees: Indicators of Performance in Higher Education*.²⁰ The authors, Paul E. Barton and Archie LaPointe, examine the literacy of American college students and others. Although *Learning by Degrees* is nationwide in scope, Michigan results are included and its portrait of college students and recent graduates is troubling.

Barton and LaPointe describe the "levels of literateness" of contemporary American college students as ranging from "a lot less than impressive to mediocre to near alarming, depending on who is making the judgment."²¹ They assert that "relatively few [four-year college graduates] reach the highest level" of literateness, or what they call "Level 5." But an astonishing 47 percent of four-year college graduates "do not reach Levels 4 and 5;" they function, that is, at what most Americans older than forty would regard as a seventh-grade level of reading and writing.²² Barton and LaPointe's finding in this regard should be linked with Scheetz's comment, in *Recruiting Trends*, that employers find new holders of four-year degrees to have "poor communications skills"²³ and "expectations . . . too high for available positions."²⁴

Barton and LaPointe describe a typical "Level 4" task as "using a bus schedule to determine the appropriate bus to take for a given set of conditions."²⁵ The tasks at "Level 5" are hardly challenging; they consist in making inferences based on indirect or partial evidence, or rejecting a superficially plausible explanation on the basis of internal contradictions or missing information.²⁶ Only 8 percent of four-year graduates reach the competence of "Level 5."²⁷ No wonder the employers surveyed by Scheetz, in *Recruiting Trends*, cited a lack of "analytical skills"²⁸ as being among the primary problems faced by new, degree-holding employees.

Both of these reports show that our institutions of higher education could do a much better job of instilling basic knowledge and skills. Too little attention is devoted to academic basics and intellectual rigor, and scarcely any attention to ethical development or character building, even though all of these were once important goals of traditional higher education. Indeed, the NAS study of *The Dissolution of General Education* finds both an "evaporation of content" and a "decline of rigor" in American undergraduate education nationwide.²⁹ Courses abound which, in name, seem to address the matter of basics. But time and time again, when talking to traditionally oriented teachers in the state universities of Michigan, one will hear the complaint that students read, write and think at an unacceptably low level.

As I have noted elsewhere on the subject of literacy in America's colleges and universities, with particular reference to my experience as a teacher in the Michigan system, even students at the graduate level make numerous basic language errors and demonstrate an

underdeveloped vocabulary.³⁰ At the undergraduate level, the norm is so low that one cannot take for granted that students will know how to write—and thus know how to read and accurately interpret—a sentence with multiple subordinate clauses. As a consequence, to quote Scheetz, “new college graduates are not adequately prepared for the everyday work world.”³¹

II. The Decomposition of English Composition

This chapter spells out the most fundamental and evident reason for the unsatisfactory cognitive performance of college graduates, a deficiency in the course which, more than any other, is supposed to instill cognitive competency. The course is English composition, frequently called freshman composition. Freshman composition has come to harbor some of the most profound pedagogical problems currently affecting the curriculum. A number of recent critics have focused on this essential course and its fate in the postmodern academy.

College graduates forty years old and older will no doubt remember taking freshman composition. In this course they learned the fundamentals of written exposition, including a review of grammar and syntax and some lessons in informal logic and the rules of evidence. Freshman composition struck many as tedious, and yet it sharpened universally applicable skills that helped them deal meaningfully with material and assignments in other courses and in their later careers.

Such a direct and sensible method of teaching young adults the subtleties of verbal exposition grew out of the hundreds, if not thousands, of years of literacy that mark the Western tradition beginning with the Greeks. It is no coincidence that the Roman writer Quintilian’s *Education of an Orator*, the classic work of ancient pedagogy, was still in use in the early part of this century. Many other approaches to the inculcation of literacy in use well into this century were directly based on Quintilian. Michigan universities in previous eras upheld that tradition. For example, the 1914 *Catalogue* of the University of Michigan requires that *applicants* to the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts “be prepared to state intelligently the essential principles of grammar and to explain the syntactical structure of any sentence encountered in his reading.”³²

Today this has changed. The less-than-satisfactory literacy of today’s college students can be traced, as Heather Mac Donald³³ and Steve Kogan³⁴ have recently traced it in two articles on the subject, to a set of educational theories that have come to dominate the teaching of reading, writing, and thinking, not only in today’s universities, but in elementary and secondary schools as well. (It is virtually certain that ideas that show up in the academy will soon appear in the K-12 public schools.) The purpose of this section is to establish the link between the disappointing literacy of today’s college students and the prevailing methods of college level writing instruction.

The official position of the Conference for College Composition and Communication (4Cs), the umbrella organization for professional composition teachers, is that “if we can convince our students that spelling, punctuation, and usage are less important than content, we

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[will] have removed a major obstacle in their developing their ability to write.”³⁵ To understand the inconsistency of this claim, consider transferring it to another field, to mathematics. If we could convince our students that formal procedures for multiplication and division are less important than making interesting sequences of numbers, we would have removed a major obstacle in their developing their ability to think quantitatively. Of course, we would also have left them incapable of balancing their checkbooks, which in turn would leave them unfit for much of adult life.³⁶ The 4Cs’ claim, then, defies logic and flouts the very meaning of literacy. Linguistic competency has been redefined by many composition teachers as *illiteracy*.

Today’s professional composition teachers are not worried by this, judging by their presentations at the 1995 meeting of the Michigan Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters, the major organization for Michigan academics. These talks reflect the same values as the 4Cs statement. One paper, cowritten by two freshman composition instructors at Michigan State University, bore the title “Enfleshment.” The authors’ description of their paper illustrates much of what troubles contemporary composition teaching:

The postmodern quest for multiculturalism in recanonization has brought with it the problem of teachers choosing to speak for writers, texts, and students who are—in opposition to the teacher as a raced, classed, and gendered self—Others [sic.]. This opens up the danger that, in making the choice to represent minority literatures, members of the hegemonic order may be perceived as appropriating, rather than representing, those works.

Moreover, the same problematic exists in composition courses where hegemony dictates the voices of minority students and their writings, and must judge the students’ work as valid or flawed. Yet if the teacher, lacking the experience which minority students bring to bear on their discourse, cannot truly speak from that experience as a common ground with the writer, can s/he speak for the writer and the work?

This paper will provide an overview of the current heated debates taking place in the language field over this issue, and provide an outline for a course of ethical self-evaluation that teachers must at all times undergo if they are to avoid continued oppression and appropriation of students and their discourses . . . we will build upon Peter McLaren’s theory of “enfleshment” and argue for constant awareness of the cultural and moral dangers inherent in postmodernism’s pedagogical freedom.³⁷

This statement goes far to suggest why contemporary college students write so poorly. It is itself poorly written, containing arcane jargon, and heavily burdened by the rhetoric of victim politics. The otherwise obscure references to “oppression” and “hegemony” are references to the theory that society is divided into an elite minority of “oppressors” and a morally sanctified majority of “victims” and “marginalized persons.” The statement’s attack on societal norms is a common feature of contemporary academic discourse and the sentiments expressed by the authors reflect the focus of composition pedagogy upon a supposed class struggle in American society. Nowhere in their declaration do the authors address the perhaps bland but necessary mission of composition courses—namely, to teach college students how to read and write.

Today the dominant view of freshman composition is that it is an experience in moral liberation rather than a rigorous exercise in the skills of verbal exposition. This view is imposed on the curriculum on campuses nationwide, including the state universities of Michigan, by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and by the regional accreditation agencies that certify English departments, writing programs, and teacher education programs. Heather Mac Donald writes in *The Public Interest* that

In the field of writing, today's education is not just an irrelevance, it is positively detrimental to a student's development. For years, composition teachers have absorbed the worst strains of both popular and academic culture. . . . The only thing composition teachers are not talking and writing about these days is how to teach students to compose clear, logical prose.³⁸

Mac Donald specifically criticizes what ranks today as the almost universally approved approach to the teaching of writing at the college level, and increasingly at the elementary and secondary levels, the so-called process approach to composition.

The process approach was formulated in the mid-1960s by Peter Elbow and a number of other college instructors who identified strongly with campus rebelliousness of the times. It was ratified as the preferred approach to composition instruction at a conference at Dartmouth in 1966. Process methodology stresses writing as a form of personal expression and places a stigma on concepts like syntax and grammar. Paradoxically, it also emphasizes writing as a group activity. (See Mac Donald's comment below.) At the same time, the process approach de-emphasizes the linkage between reading competency on the one hand and writing competency on the other.

The newly issued *Standards for the English Language Arts*,³⁹ compiled by the NCTE, says that students "should employ a wide range of strategies as they write" and "apply [a] knowledge of language structure," but never invokes the idea of grammar or stipulates that students must learn before they apply. According to these precepts, the oral language or "dialect" that students bring with them into their freshman year should be validated, not corrected, whether it is adequate to the expression of sophisticated concepts or not. The attempt to get students to write Standard Written English amounts to a violation of their "right" to persist in the loose habits of their spoken version of English.⁴⁰

In the language of the 4Cs which, with the NCTE, is one of the most influential groups of composition teachers nationwide: "The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans."⁴¹

Of 140 freshman composition syllabi received from all campuses of the state universities of Michigan, only seven appeared to deviate significantly from the process approach.⁴² The actual percentage of teachers using a traditional, as opposed to the process, approach might be slightly higher or lower than suggested by this figure because the 140 syllabi do not fully cover the many hundreds of individual sections of this course. Nevertheless, because of the demands made on departments by the NCTE and by associated accreditation agencies, like the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), English departments and writing programs officially favor the process approach or related and derivative approaches, and many impose it. The process approach has become part of the academic

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The consequence of this philosophy is students deficient in rudimentary knowledge and lacking in skills who have been made cynical about writing by teachers whose main goal seems to be not education but indoctrination.

subculture of English department and writing programs. Its validity, although called into doubt by surveys of college level literacy, is rarely questioned.

In-state journals devoted to the teaching of freshman composition and related courses—*The Language Arts Journal of Michigan* and *The Michigan Literacy Cooperative*—make it quite clear that the process approach is the approved approach in the state universities of Michigan, as it is around the nation. The English Department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is prominent among English departments nationally in promulgating the process approach and its often politicized offshoots. Essays by writing specialists from UM, Ann Arbor, appear frequently in specialized journals like *College English*, *College Composition* and *Communication*, and *Lingua Franca*. The papers presented by Michigan writing instructors at conferences, such as the annual meeting of the Michigan Academy, again suggest the currency of process and related pedagogies. Thus the errors of that approach are as entrenched in Michigan writing courses as they are elsewhere in the nation. But this is not the full extent of the problem.

Politically biased or tendentious composition courses tend to graft their ideological content onto a process approach. This can occur quite easily because the process approach incorporated pronounced political assumptions from the beginning. This chapter has already cited the 1970 claim of the 4Cs executive committee that correcting the grammar of student papers is immoral.⁴³ More recently, in the introduction to a widely used reader for college-level composition courses, Tracy Kidder asserted that

As every graduate student knows, only a fool would try to think or bear witness to events objectively anymore, and only an intellectual crook would claim to have done so. . . . Writers . . . [should] make themselves their main subject matter, since one's own self is the only subject one can really know.⁴⁴

The dual message, represented by the 4Cs declaration and Kidder's argument, is that the goal of writing students is to express themselves in casual, nongrammatical prose if that is the way they wish to write and that they should not be taught to treat topics objectively, since objective knowledge is an illusion. Kidder's claim that an assertion of objective knowledge is the sign of "an intellectual crook" is saddening and antiscientific. The consequence of this philosophy is students deficient in rudimentary knowledge and lacking in skills who have been made cynical about writing by teachers whose main goal seems to be not education but indoctrination.

Steve Kogan, an observer of current trends in composition, writes in a similar vein in an article for the journal *Academic Questions* that the state of the crucial freshman composition course is "truly disturbing,"⁴⁵ saturated as it is by "literary-political theory"⁴⁶ and weakened intellectually by the substitution of "jargon for insights."⁴⁷ Indeed, "the very concepts of correctness, vivid writing, and clarity have frequently been dismissed" by contemporary composition specialists, Kogan notes.⁴⁸

The traditional obligation of college level writing instructors was to teach students the rudiments of higher literacy, or simply of literacy. But many such teachers, taking their cue from the NCTE, insist that students must use "their own language," and leave instruction in basics out of the curriculum. The NCTE *Standards* refer to students' "home language," speak of "dramatiz[ing] cultural frameworks," and urge instruction in "orchestrating texts."⁴⁹

The same *Standards* omits any statement in plain language that suggests that students should receive explicit instruction in grammar. Instructors who dissent from these ideas find themselves pressured to conform to them.

As Mac Donald puts it: “There is a basic law at work in current composition theory: As students’ writing gets worse, the critical vocabulary used to assess it grows ever more pompous.”⁵⁰ What happens when students as poorly prepared as Mac Donald and Barton and LaPointe describe them enter the job market? The employers canvassed by Scheetz in *Recruiting Trends* use plain language: They say that their newly hired employees are sorely lacking in communication skills.⁵¹

Course syllabi and related materials from English departments and writing programs throughout the state universities of Michigan confirm that the situation described by Mac Donald and Kogan is the one that prevails. The process approach is not only officially favored, or even mandated; sometimes alternative approaches are subject to reprimand. At CMU, for example, a widely published and well-liked English professor was preliminarily denied tenure on the grounds that he had not participated in workshops and seminars designed to assimilate composition instructors to the process approach. The denial was overturned at a higher level than the department, but the message was clear. The department made it clear by this action that, as far as it was concerned, other approaches were not an option.⁵² In Mac Donald’s evaluation, however, the existing dominant approach to composition, the process approach, “drives out standards,”⁵³ a claim made all the more plausible by the policies and guidelines of the NCTE and by representative “theoretical” pronouncements such as the conference paper on “Enfleshment.” The dominance of instructional methods in composition which stress self-expression and alleged moral liberation over prose competency goes far in explaining why beginning college students on Michigan campuses do not acquire higher literacy.

Inclusion of trivial course content is part of the explanation, too. Consider this assignment, offered as a model to teaching assistants at CMU: “Watch a TV talk show in which a controversial subject is presented or a provocative personality appears. Many of these shows exist (*Oprah*, *Donahue*, *Montel*, *Maurry*, etc.) and are on TV during the day and late at night.” Having watched *Oprah* or *Montel*, teachers are then to direct the students to write a short paper. According to the designer of the assignment, “this paper will be the second assignment in a college 101 composition course and will comprise six 50-minute class periods.”⁵⁴ According to this model, two weeks of a fifteen-week semester should be devoted to talking about TV talk shows.

The dereliction of the composition teachers lies at the very heart of today’s deficient undergraduate education. Rather than setting the goal of teaching students how to discover and articulate truths, for example, one freshman composition syllabus from Eastern Michigan University states that “the emphasis will be on exploring new techniques” of writing, with writing defined as “a social [i.e., a group] activity.” Like most freshman composition courses being taught on Michigan campuses today,⁵⁵ this one puts the focus on “collaborative small group work,” another designation of which is “peer editing” or sometimes “peer teaching.”

This is what Mac Donald says about “peer editing,” an activity in which students who have not yet gained prose competency are supposed to substitute for the teacher and teach each other what they themselves do not know: “Many of the groups I have observed

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quickly turned their attention to more compelling matters [than grading each other's work], like last weekend's parties or the newest sneakers. No wonder, given the abysmal prose [their own] they are supposed to discuss."⁵⁶ Mac Donald continues

While peer teaching may have value for more experienced student-writers, for the incompetent—which includes not just remedial students but increasing numbers of all incoming students—it is an egregious case of the blind leading the blind. It ignores the reason students are in remedial class in the first place and violates the time-honored principle that one learns to write by reading good, not awful writing.

Students who have been told in their writing class to let their deepest selves loose on the page and not worry about syntax, logic or form have trouble adjusting to their other classes.⁵⁷ With its emphasis on personal experience and expression, the process school forgets that the ultimate task of college writing is to teach students how to think.⁵⁸

Many composition specialists who advocate the process approach routinely denounce grammar and correct usage as irrelevant or oppressive. In a collection of papers prepared for use in a CMU course where teaching assistants learn how to teach freshman composition, the following statement appears—"Traditional grammar books were unapologetically designed to instill linguistic habits which . . . were intended to separate those who had 'made it' from those who had not, the powerful from the poor."⁵⁹ The same essay refers to the difference between oral and written language as "arbitrary." Sometimes the claim is heard that Standard Written English is "elitist." The NCTE *Standards*, cited earlier, define Standard English as the language "spoken and written by those groups with social, economic, and political power in the United States" and claims that "Standard English is a relative concept."⁶⁰ No doubt a few students are happy to discover that they have already mastered the field of written expression, or that the standard form of English is "arbitrary" and "relative," but the impression is an illusion which the job market will soon dispel. Meanwhile, these methods effectively *deprive students* of knowledge which older college graduates learned well enough to take for granted. The teacher of a freshman composition course at Eastern Michigan University writes this note to students in the course syllabus: "Don't worry about writing perfect papers. I do not have a set standard for what I consider 'good writing.'"⁶¹

Another EMU composition teacher gives evidence for Kogan's claim that the freshman composition course has become a forum for political propaganda: "In this course our writing, reading, and discussions will focus on the differences—cultural, ethnic, sexual, religious, for example—that have shaped our particular sense of identity while frequently creating tensions and conflicts in our relations with other people."⁶²

The reading list for this particular course—which is not atypical—comes from an anthology entitled *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* by the separatist bell hooks (that is how she spells it), and from *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study* by Paula S. Rothenberg, director of the New Jersey Project, which aims at the insertion of radical pedagogy into American education. As Lynne Cheney notes in *Telling the Truth*,⁶³ Rothenberg's book presents "essay after essay portraying the United States as mired in racism, sexism, and elitism—not to mention that most hopeless of all states, capitalism."⁶⁴ The majority of current anthologies intended for college level writing courses can accurately be characterized as politically correct. As Kogan writes

The new anthologies . . . turn writing into an industrial process of “text” and “discourse production,” while other favorite terms are taken from the economic-political marketplace of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Paolo Freire, a marketplace not of ideas but of money and “material conditions,” including “commodification” of literary experience, “artistic production and consumption,” [etc.].

At this point, education turns into indoctrination—an indoctrination, in particular, into the evils of capitalism, in which radical pedagogues often describe standard teaching as a reflection of capitalist brutality.⁶⁵

At Central Michigan University, the Department of English Language and Literature offers a master syllabus for “Freshman Composition”⁶⁶ which carries the admonition, prefaced by the phrase “research has shown,” that “there is no carryover from classroom instruction in grammar to the students’ writing.” This admonition is simply untrue, but it is consistent with politically motivated dismissal of correct, formal prose as oppressive of or intimidating to students. The admonition appears again in the NCTE *Standards*.

The position that correctness is relative and that students cannot or should not learn language fundamentals like grammar also excuses instructors from the intense labor necessary to train poorly prepared students how to write so that employers will want to employ them.

The CMU master syllabus accepts what Jay L. Robinson of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, an exponent of “the New Rhetoric,”⁶⁷ calls “the myth of basic skills.” Robinson’s argument is that there is no connection between a knowledge of grammar, syntax, and logic, and the communication competency of students. Such a connection is merely declared, Robinson argues, by an oppressive system (capitalism) which wants to maintain a rigid and evil class structure. It leads to the “myth,” according to Robinson, that verbal mastery according to the traditional formula is a prerequisite to higher education generally or to success in life. Thus “the myth of basic skills,” Robinson writes, “deprives students of what they most need [and] those most frequently deprived, of course, are members of racial, social, and linguistic minorities.”⁶⁸ Students need affirmation of themselves, Robinson is saying, and because some of them are not competent in basic skills (like grammar and syntax) the imposition of those basic skills as standards harms them.

In reality, what harms *all* students is the failure to address those educational deficiencies which, if left unaddressed, will leave them ill-prepared for competition in a market whose demands are increasingly technical. As *Recruiting Trends* reports, the ability to speak and write competently are consistently mentioned by employers as important to the success of new employees at the same time these skills are noticeably absent from their education.⁶⁹ Similar complaints circulate on all campuses of the state universities of Michigan, as elsewhere, lodged by faculty in departments outside English who notice the poor reading, writing and thinking skills of students who have completed the writing courses. *Recruiting Trends* also suggests that graduate level education is increasingly important on the job market. But students who write so poorly that they have difficulty expressing even simple ideas will hardly find themselves prepared for graduate level work.

Arguments like Robinson’s “myth of basic skills” are today the prevalent ideas in the writing programs of the state universities of Michigan. In-state journals devoted to the teaching

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of writing, such as *The Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, do not question the premises of radical composition theory.

In contrast to the thinking of the NCTE, 4Cs, and the compositionists is this statement by Peter T. Koper, associate professor of English at Central Michigan University. Koper notes that

The teaching of grammar as part of writing instruction is essential because the dialect of Standard Written English is not the native dialect of any speaker. To learn to write, students must master many new patterns of usage. To repeat in writing the conventions of one's native dialect is to be cut off from the enormous international culture of which Standard Written English is the ground. Grammar is not elitist. It is rather quintessentially democratizing, the ability to use Standard Written English being the condition for participating in public life in this country and in much of the rest of the world.⁷⁰

Koper's statement explains in clear terms what the theoreticians of writing instruction seem unwilling or unable to understand, namely, that the teacher's interest in liberating students is inseparable from his or her obligation to instill basic knowledge—such as the knowledge of grammar—so that such knowledge becomes second nature and *permits* its possessor to go on to higher, more sophisticated tasks. The process approach and its ideological offshoots tend to strand students at the level which they occupy when they first come to the university. Postmodern models of writing instruction thus yield the tragic effect that students will remain intellectual freshman for the four or five years that it takes them to graduate.

Mac Donald mentions the particularly bad effect that the process approach to writing has on remedial students. Remedial writing instruction is today no more sensible or effective, perhaps much less so, than the ordinary types of writing instruction, as indicated by the syllabus for Central Michigan University's English 100. Intended, as the syllabus states, "to prepare students for English 101," CMU's English 100 nevertheless imposes on its students only "four formal essays from 1 1/2 to 3 pages in length." So-called "informal" assignments, the syllabus stipulates, "will be written with the intent of *approximating* Standard Written English" (emphasis added). The syllabus makes no mention of the traditional specifics of language remediation, such as grammar drill or vocabulary building. Designed by advocates of the process approach, it predictably omits these practices.⁷¹

Regarding the CMU course, it is interesting to note that English 100 was created because of *general complaints* about student writing. Interviewed in *CM Life*⁷² for April 3, 1996, then Chairman of the English Department Francis Molson was quoted as saying that his faculty "had created English 100 . . . because faculty campus-wide have complained that many freshmen are lacking writing skills." As with similar courses on other campuses of the state university system, CMU's remedial English 100 will be given for credit. Giving credit for remedial courses is one of the symptoms of curricular downgrading cited by the NAS report on *The Dissolution of General Education*. This situation is compounded because the process approach to writing has long since permeated the K-12 public schools and is probably a contributing factor in the poor language skills of incoming freshmen.⁷³

Is there nothing good about the process approach? In fact, in its milder forms, it emphasizes some important steps in acquiring mastery of written language. The process

approach stresses that writing is above all a conscious activity and it urges careful revision. On the other hand, older and alternative approaches included similar emphases and they also linked mastery of writing with mastery of reading. Older and alternative approaches likewise retained the premise that careful instruction in basics—in grammar—is prerequisite to analytical or creative applications of written language. There are probably some students who learn relevant writing skills in “process” classrooms. Nevertheless, the ascendancy of the process approach is coincident with the increase in complaints about college level literacy.

Another aspect of the freshman composition problem that deserves scrutiny is the universal practice of staffing the course with teaching assistants and non-Ph.D.-holding adjunct faculty, usually hired on a part-time basis and often only a few years older and a bit more educated than those whom they are assigned to teach. This practice is decried by many critics of contemporary higher education. It often means that very young “instructors,” sometimes only four or five years older than the students, are placed in charge of this crucial course.

A sign that freshman composition is taught by graduate students and non-Ph.D.-holding adjunct faculty is that, in the schedule of classes issued semester-by-semester on each of the state universities of Michigan campuses, the word “Staff” appears after the (sometimes) scores of sections of this crucial course. Despite the strong affirmation of the principle of academic freedom within the academy, and despite the universal acknowledgment that freshman composition is a crucial event in the intellectual career of college and university students, there is also a broad and thoroughly contradictory consensus that one does not need to know very much to teach this course and that one should only teach it in the manner approved by the composition teachers.

According to this position, freshman composition can be left to the least academically prepared, least mature, and least intellectually tested teachers, to the teaching assistants or even to the undergraduate “tutors” who are employed at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Apparently, the lack of experience of these novice instructors is supposed to be offset by their adherence to the process approach and their supervision by senior writing faculty.

But as Mac Donald, Kogan, and many others suggest, the composition experts are themselves the problem, insisting as they almost universally do on spurious criteria which are often the opposite of those that constitute real literacy, and advocating jargon-filled theories which have little or nothing to do with the prose competency of their students.

III. Foreign Language Follies

Economists, political scientists, even composition instructors devoted to the process approach, tell us that the marketplace is becoming ever more global and that, in order to compete in the global marketplace, American students will need to be able to communicate in nations not their own to people different from them. The traditional way of establishing communication with people of another nation has been to learn their language as competently as possible in order to make oneself clear and avoid the confusion of linguistic mistakes and inaccuracies. Knowing another language is, moreover, the first step in acquiring a

The composition experts are themselves the problem.

wider notion of the society represented by that language. Today, however, at the very moment when the global marketplace is being celebrated, colleges and universities, including the state universities of Michigan, have all but eliminated foreign language requirements. In addition, foreign language studies are falling prey to many of the same biases that plague freshman composition.

Among other desirable types of college level training named by employers in *Recruiting Trends* is training in a foreign language. "Foreign languages offered real advantages when employers were considering current employees for advancement."⁷⁴ Yet no branch of the state universities of Michigan imposes a clear-cut, universal foreign language requirement on undergraduates. Requirements at MSU and CMU contain loopholes. And foreign language departments are meanwhile increasingly subject to the same kind of questionable pedagogy that is evident in the case of freshman composition.

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An example is supplied by efforts within the Department of Linguistics and Languages at Michigan State aimed at "restructuring" its curriculum. One of the architects of this development is Patrick McConeghy, a professor of German at MSU, who has published a number of articles in which he develops his ideas. McConeghy has been invited to speak on other campuses by language departments seeking what they often call a "new paradigm" for foreign language instruction. It is McConeghy's argument that foreign language instruction is too "elitist."⁷⁵ According to his plan, foreign language programs should be reconstructed to make them more "relevant" and "appealing" to students. This entails the de-emphasis of literary culture in favor of a version of popular culture articulated around the idea of class conflict as the basic human condition. Under this concept, literary culture becomes a tool of oppression used by those who hold power against those who find themselves in the position of powerlessness.

What McConeghy's article⁷⁶ calls "internationalizing the curriculum"⁷⁷ might more accurately be described as giving it a political character, infusing it with multiculturalism, and making it one more forum for the ubiquitous "victimology" associated with the humanities and social sciences. This could lead to absurd results in some cases. How is it possible, for example, to "internationalize" German, a language largely confined to Central Europe? And what about Swedish, Thai, or Athabascan? As is increasingly typical across the curriculum, this proposal gives little attention to the intellectual significance of instruction in a second language, and portrays the language course as a vehicle for promoting the concerns of so-called oppressed groups associated, however loosely, with other languages. In this framework, Turkish guestworkers in Germany become more important than Schiller and Goethe. Are Turks important? Of course. But why not, in that case, study Turkish?

Traditionally, teachers have understood the value of learning another language to reside in the rigor of acquiring a grammar, syntax, and vocabulary different from those of one's native language, and in exploring the literature of the new language to gain insights which can then be compared with the insights generated by one's native literary tradition.

For this reason, freshman composition consisted historically of a study of rhetoric involving much analysis of literary and other texts. One acquired mastery in one's own language in part by immersion in the best that it could offer. The admirable goal of foreign language instruction was to make students *literate* in a second language by a similar method of high-level immersion. The guiding theoreticians in composition programs seem to have

rejected this insight. Many teachers of foreign languages are preparing to do the same. Hence the strangely named “internationalization” of language courses.

In his model syllabus for an “internationalized” German program at Michigan State,⁷⁸ McConeghy limits mandatory literature courses to two, placing emphasis instead on a sequence of “life and literature” courses. In the model course, called “German Life and Literature: Cultural Differences” (German 440), the syllabus directs students to study “mainstream strategies to deal with difference” by reading an anthology (in English!) called *Contemporary Perspectives on Psychotherapy with Lesbians and Gay Men*.

This roughly parallels the freshman composition course at Eastern Michigan University which requires students to study anthologies of black separatist and Marxist literature.

The representative “internationalized” German syllabus directs students to spend a week on “Turkish Women Workers in Germany,” a week on “Male Guestworkers in Germany,” a week on “Peasants in the Middle Ages,” two weeks on “Afro-Germans,” one week on “Gays, Bisexuals and Lesbians,” two weeks on “Male Homosexuals,” one week on “German Immigrants in Michigan,” and an equivalent one week at the very end of the course on “German Jews.” Only one text listed in the bibliography for this course, *Die Judenverfolgung in Mannheim 1933-1945* by H. J. Fliedner (from which students read a total of 85 pages), appears to provide a serious discussion of the Holocaust.⁷⁹

Traditionally, the “internationalized” argument claims, foreign language teachers “choose course materials according to how well they suit a certain language level or represent the literary expressions of the period.”⁸⁰ But under the “new paradigm,” McConeghy continues, “our first criterion . . . would be how well [the materials] reflect the values and beliefs of the members of our target culture at a given time.”⁸¹

As the “internationalist” school sees it, foreign language studies in the American university are “dominated by a hierarchy that places literary studies above all others, often to the exclusion of cultural studies beyond the first two years of language learning.”⁸² But in what sense, one may wonder, are literary studies *not* part of cultural studies? Since literature is the forum in which a culture’s most perceptive observers document their own tradition—as Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola did for French culture in the nineteenth century, as Herman Melville and Mark Twain did for American culture during the same period—literature is a central and indispensable element in the study and acquisition of diverse viewpoints other than one’s own.

The error of traditional language teachers, McConeghy argues, is that they stress “correctness before communication” and promote “literary periods, genres, and great authors” over “culture.”⁸³ “Culture,” however, certainly includes the history, politics, art, and literature of a people, even if it is not comprised exclusively of these things. What McConeghy appears to be doing covertly is rehearsing the familiar Marxist attack against “bourgeois” or middle-class culture by championing the so-called proletariat. This type of argument, although common in the academy, has little empirical relevance to late twentieth century life in a technological and democratic society.

Where does this type of thinking lead? It leads to a German major who focuses a disproportionate amount of attention on the lifestyles of contemporary German gays and

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lesbians and, devoting two weeks to the study of Turkish women guestworkers in Germany, can spare only one week in which to consider the Holocaust. The “new paradigm” largely rejects the traditional content and methods of language instruction, generated and refined over long periods of time, and embraces pedagogical values similar to those evident in today’s degraded freshman composition course. The associated rejection of “correctness” is nothing less than a rejection of grammar, the basis of rigor in language, and the rejection of canonical literary texts in favor of popular culture.

The “internationalized” formula is not presently the universal formula for foreign language studies, but given the success of similar ideological formulas in English departments, it enjoys a great likelihood of becoming the typical formula for foreign language studies. A Spanish teacher at Central Michigan University advises me that she is now forced to teach with a textbook that explicitly disdains grammar and correctness and favors popular over literate culture. This is a sign that foreign language programs are in trouble.

An article in *Foreign Language Annals* on the teaching of Spanish adopts terminology from contemporary composition theory, asserting that, “since facts are unstable,” as the writer claims, “many suggest that the acquisition of cultural knowledge should be *process-oriented* rather than *product-oriented*.”⁸⁴ Another article in the same issue advocates “holistic scoring,” a grading system that rejects the traditional criterion of linguistic correctness in favor of the now-familiar concern with so-called expressiveness and so-called student self-esteem.⁸⁵

McConeghy is thus by no means simply one lone, eccentric voice. He represents an influential movement within college level foreign language departments. Foreign language studies appear to be embarking on the same path taken by composition studies thirty years ago, and the result is likely to be the same: the nullification of intellectual standards in the field—and another group of students tragically ill-served.

Susan B. Delaney, an associate professor of French at Central Michigan University, explains the tried and tested rationale of traditional foreign language instruction:

Grammar provides the structure that makes communication in a foreign language possible. Without a sound grammar base, the student can at best speak a pidgin language full of vocabulary but not held together in a way meaningful to the native speaker. The misunderstandings that result from faulty grammar can be harmless and comical, but they can also be embarrassing to the badly taught speaker, and confusing, boring, or even insulting to the foreign listener. Ultimately, the American student who is poorly educated in the grammar of a foreign language, appears less intelligent than he or she really is, because complex thought cannot be conveyed in the absence of an equally complex linguistic apparatus.⁸⁶

Delaney’s formula agrees with Koper’s statement about the centrality of grammar and other basics to the study of English composition cited in the previous chapter. The *absence* of their type of thinking from so much of the existing curriculum may well explain the troubling observations about the knowledge and ability of today’s college graduates made by the researchers quoted in chapter 1. Delaney also remarks, in conversation, that her students have difficulty with French grammar and she attributes this to their never having learned English grammar. Part of the tragedy of the transformation of foreign language programs

from their traditional form to the form dictated by the “new paradigm” is that, once this transformation is complete, there will be no place in the university where students are challenged to live up to the standards embodied in grammar and literature. As the philosopher Teilhard de Chardin liked to say, the limits of one’s language determine the limits of one’s thoughts. Heather Mac Donald might well have been thinking of this insight when she noted in her article on freshman composition that failure to instill language competency leaves students unable to think.

Foreign language programs have served the incidental but useful purpose of teaching many students what the mandatory freshman composition course now fails to teach them, but this may not be the case much longer, as viewpoints like McConeghy’s become dominant. Of course, the downgrading of foreign language instruction might ultimately be irrelevant, since fewer and fewer undergraduate majors require students to master a foreign language.

IV. The Coreless, Canonless Curriculum

The core of the core curriculum, freshman composition, no longer serves its traditional purpose of instilling the habits of literacy in beginning college students. Freshman composition is, in this sense, symptomatic of the core curriculum in general. A core curriculum, defined earlier, is the set of courses in the arts and sciences deemed essential which all students must take regardless of their special area of study. Old catalogs from the state universities of Michigan show that, in the first half of this century, the Michigan system of higher education had a well defined and nearly uniform core curriculum for undergraduates and that this was rigorous and substantial. In the second half of this century, in a process that has accelerated in the last twenty years, the core curriculum—the common experience of all graduates and the basis of their intellectual competency—has ceased to exist in any meaningful way. In its place has arisen a profusion of disconnected and narrowly specialized courses. If the downgraded freshman composition course is the primary cause behind the poor intellectual performances of today’s college graduates, then the decline of the core curriculum may similarly explain their lack of basic knowledge in the arts, history and science.

The intellectual deterioration of the freshman composition course by postmodern pedagogues is the least known but probably the most significant nullification of the academic curriculum in higher education today. In a conversation, the head of the English department at one of Michigan’s private colleges refers to the process approach to composition as a “disease,” but worries resignedly that “nothing can be done about it.”⁸⁷ The same errors and obsessions that have damaged freshman composition, in many ways the most important course students take while at college, have also begun to make themselves felt in foreign language programs. This too has received little publicity.

The deterioration of the curriculum in the humanities has been, on the other hand, the topic of much journalism and many books. Popular books like Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* and Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* have presented the subject to large audiences. “Humanities” has traditionally meant literary studies in English and other language traditions, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, music and the arts.

The core curriculum has ceased to exist in any meaningful way.

Western civilization shows a continuous tradition of higher education centered on a remarkably stable, even though growing, set of texts regarded as embodying inescapable insights or knowledge.

These disciplines constitute the core of what used to be called liberal studies or the liberal arts. This has very practical significance because, according to *Recruiting Trends*, employers want the graduates whom they hire to be, not just specialists, but “generalists.”⁸⁸ Indeed, as *Recruiting Trends* puts it, employers increasingly express the opinion that college students need to take “the liberal arts approach”⁸⁹ to their education.

Before answering the question of how the liberal arts currently fare in the state universities of Michigan, it will be useful to explain why employers, not usually thought of as concerned with the “soft” side of the curriculum, have come to regard the liberal arts as important to the success of new employees.

Liberal studies train the mind in all sorts of subtle ways. They promote self-reflection and increase the level of the student’s conceptual sophistication. It is clear from the dialogues of the philosopher Plato, who lived twenty-five hundred years ago in Athens, that the study of literature, history, politics, and music had already been understood by the Greeks as formative for and essential to meaningful adult participation in the higher life of the community. Simply put, study of these subjects forms and informs the mind; it trains the student in the arts of inference and argumentation; it instructs the student in the subtleties of human behavior; it encourages self-criticism; it enriches public and private life.

Although those who denounce this ancient tradition may claim that the modern liberal curriculum came into being only in the late nineteenth century with the founding of modern universities like Cornell or Stanford, and that its methods are arbitrary, the fact is that Western civilization shows a continuous tradition of higher education centered on a remarkably stable, even though growing, set of texts regarded as embodying inescapable insights or knowledge. This tradition is at the same time methodologically consistent.

Plato’s successor, Aristotle, said that “poetry” (by which he meant *literature*), was more important to study than history, because “poetry” illustrated a range of possible actions whereas history remained restricted to the actions in fact undertaken by past persons.

In the nineteenth century, the poet and scholar Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) famously argued that the study of literature and the arts had a civilizing effect on young people that could be gleaned from no other source. “From a man without philosophy,” Arnold wrote, “no one can expect philosophical completeness.”⁹⁰ The study of literature in particular, Arnold claimed, had the capacity to clear one’s mind of the narrow prejudices of one’s times and place, and was therefore important quite beyond its own intrinsic boundaries:

The more men’s minds are cleared, the more the results of science are frankly accepted, the more that poetry and eloquence come to be received and studied as what in truth they really are—the criticism of life by gifted men, alive and active with extraordinary power at an unusual number of points—so much the more will the value of humane letters, and of art also, which is an utterance having a like kind of power with theirs, be felt and acknowledged, and their place in education be secured.⁹¹

Arnold appears to be making the same argument as the employers cited by *Recruiting Trends*. Of course, Arnold thought that it was important to be broadly educated in other subjects, too, but he put the humanities (as we would call them) at the center of meaningful

education. In a 1994 symposium sponsored by the National Association of Scholars,⁹² Robert Conquest, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution defined the humanities as the study of “the expression of our whole past, of our whole context of life and time—and not only ours.”⁹³ René Girard, Hammond Professor of French at Stanford (now retired), argued that “far from being arbitrary,” as its denouncers declare it, “the [traditional] literary canon [i.e., the set of great books] comprises the best in our culture and in other cultures regardless of specialization.”⁹⁴ (See also chapter 6, “Sifting a Learnt Tradition.”)

James Q. Wilson, James Collins Professor of Government and Management at the University of California at Los Angeles, remembered a powerful experience during his freshman year at the University of Redlands (California): “I was told that everyone must take a required course on the growth of civilization. Taught by various professors from the humanities, it introduced an eighteen-year-old California boy to Charlemagne and Shakespeare, the Goth[s] and the Visigoths, imperial Rome and imperial Persia, Confucius and Aquinas, Héloïse and Abélard, Rousseau and the Renaissance.”⁹⁵ Wilson doubts that the typical college freshman today has the opportunity to confront such life-changing revelations, so much has the traditional curriculum been dismantled. “Learning requires both awe and engagement,” Wilson writes, and only what is “great” provides these ingredients.⁹⁶

A liberal element in higher education is important because the liberal arts train students to think critically and abstractly at the conceptual level and provide them with the knowledge that is indispensable to coherent argument about and genuine understanding of human relations. The liberal arts constitute the training ground of generalized thinking skills of the type that the employers surveyed by *Recruiting Trends* want graduates to have but find missing in them. The attitudinal deficiencies of new employees (“a sense of superiority was noted too”), for example, can very plausibly be derived from a lack of real introspective capacity, and this in turn can be derived from the absence of ethical instruction formerly implicit in a widespread humanities requirement in the general undergraduate curriculum.

Long-time history teacher Robert Money of Lake Superior State University has argued, in a conference presentation, that the exclusion of ethics from the college curriculum has had dire results. “There was a time,” states Money, “in the mid-nineteenth century, when secular morality held sway” and was an explicit theme at all levels of education. Money asks rhetorically, “Was that all so bad?”⁹⁷

Today the traditional humanities curriculum is either harshly criticized or nowhere to be seen. A recent report issued by the National Association of Scholars, *The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*,⁹⁸ concludes that the traditional core curriculum in American colleges and universities, with a few notable exceptions, has ceased to exist. Western Michigan University provides an example.

The only courses required of all students, regardless of their major, are those listed under Western’s “Intellectual Skills Requirements.” These are the entry level writing courses and mathematics courses, like freshman composition and beginning algebra (subjects which students used to learn in high school). As I have already shown, however, freshman composition lacks realistic orientation to the traditional standards of literacy. Western does insist on a “General Education Distribution Core,” as they now call it, to be completed before graduation by every student, but this only illustrates the ambiguity of contemporary undergraduate curricula, because the core itself is not what it claims to be. (The “core” used to be called a “program.”)

The traditional core curriculum in American colleges and universities, with a few notable exceptions, has ceased to exist.

Under Western's dispensation, there are three so-called categories—Arts: Creativity and Expression; Science: Context and Institution; and Society: Heritage and Prospect—embracing twelve so-called areas from which students must select a minimum of 37 hours of course work. The terms “category” and “area” need to be qualified because they normally imply a high degree of coherence; but in Western's curriculum, the terms apply to large and conceptually nebulous groupings of courses. Under Arts: Creativity and Expression, the catalog lists 53 courses; under Science: Context and Institutions, it lists 43 courses; under Society: Heritage and Prospect, it lists 110 courses. The total number of courses from which students may select is 206 courses (up from 187 courses under the previous system).

Although the stated purpose of the “Core” is “to ensure academic breadth,” what the array of courses seems to offer is an eclectic experience likely to be extraordinarily different for each student. This is because the chances of any two students choosing an identical curriculum are very small. The types of education that stem from such a wide and unrelated range of choices are therefore likely to diverge remarkably in terms of their content and quality. Thus from Arts: Creativity and Expression, a student might select Art 120 and History 100. The former bears the description of a general and historical introduction to painting and sculpture; the latter of an introduction to the ancient phase of Western history. In their descriptions, both sound like good courses. But a student might also satisfy the same requirement by selecting Women's Studies 100 and English 210, both of which deal primarily with film and other mass-media rather than with written material. (The postmodern curriculum is full of what its designers call “nonprint media” or even, as in the NCTE *Standards*, “nonprint texts.” Such “nonprint texts” can include comic books, posters, and other similar items.)

From Society: Heritage and Prospect, a student might select Economics 100, Contemporary Economic Problems, and Geography 244, Economic Geography. Again, judging by the course descriptions given in the catalog, these would represent substantive choices on the part of the student. But the student could also select Women's Studies 200, described as an Introduction to Women's Studies, and History 210, described as American history to 1890. The point has been made by Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, and other feminist critics of feminism that Women's Studies courses are today the most intellectually dubious courses offered on college campuses and constitute part of the de facto apartheid (the separation of race and gender groups) practiced under the regime of multiculturalism. American history might be an excellent course, although here, too, such courses are not always what they seem or claim to be.⁹⁹ The controversial National History Standards, condemned overwhelmingly in a special resolution by the United States Senate, originated in university history departments.¹⁰⁰ These standards, which many history professors would impose on public schools, promote what many scholars have identified as a narrowly sectarian rather than a broad and inclusive interpretation of history.¹⁰¹

In sum, Western's “Core” appears to offer a smorgasbord of courses which might or might not give a student a solid grounding in general knowledge. The vast array of possible courses introduces a destructive element of chance into the curriculum. Most students probably do not choose a selection of courses that adds up to a coherent general education.

Central Michigan University's “University Program,” which is the equivalent of Western's Education Distribution Program, is similarly eclectic. So are the general requirements listed by Eastern Michigan University and Michigan State University. In all cases, the range of courses from which students are supposed to choose remains so wide that a common educational experience is all but ruled out in advance. Similar situations exist at Eastern

Michigan, Michigan State, Wayne State, Grand Valley State, Ferris State, and other campuses of the state universities. This is no surprise: The smorgasbord approach to general education prevails everywhere in the state universities of Michigan.

Simply put, there is no core curriculum today. There is certainly no mandatory general and substantial course of the type described by James Q. Wilson that would introduce all students to the “Western Rational Tradition” (as John Searle calls it) and at least give them that as a common experience.

Gertrude Himmelfarb, Professor Emeritus of History at the City University of New York, has argued that one of the best things that could be done to improve higher education in the United States would be to “restore a core curriculum, a structured course of studies such as was common a few decades ago, not only at Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago but at most colleges and universities throughout the country.”¹⁰²

Himmelfarb cites a recent National Endowment for the Humanities Survey which found that students could graduate from

- 78% of the nation’s colleges and universities without ever taking a course in the history of Western civilization;
- 38% without any history at all;
- 45% without a course in American or English literature;
- 77% without a course in a foreign language;
- 41% without a course in mathematics; and
- 33% without a course in the sciences.¹⁰³

How do the state universities of Michigan compare to these figures? Rita Zürcher of the National Association of Scholars has been examining the documentable decline of the core curriculum at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and 49 other top ranked colleges and universities throughout the country. The results of her research form a major part of the NAS’s *Dissolution of General Education*, previously cited. When asked in an interview how closely the NEH figures cited by Himmelfarb tallied with what she knew about the core curriculum at the Ann Arbor campus today, Zürcher said that the correspondence was “very close.”¹⁰⁴ Large numbers of students are graduating from the Ann Arbor campus without any significant exposure to Western civilization, history, foreign language, mathematics, or the sciences. It is interesting to put these findings in historical perspective.

In 1914, the total number of course hours required to graduate from the University of Michigan was 120. (A “course hour” designates the number of hours per week that a given course meets; a four course hour seminar in history, for example, meets four hours a week for the fifteen weeks of the semester.) Of those 120 hours, 42 were mandatory course hours to be taken in a limited pool of carefully stipulated courses spread across four areas. Within these areas there were a total of five categories. The 1914 *Catalogue* makes it abundantly clear that these were substantial courses: The literature requirement actually stipulates a list of great books which students at that time needed to know *before* they can be admitted to the College of Letters and Sciences. The program imposed requirements in philosophy, history, economics, political science, fine arts, composition, and foreign language.

By 1993, as Zürcher’s tabulations show, this focused and explicit curriculum had been replaced by one in which students “choose” from among hundreds of courses in broadly

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The core curriculum has not only deteriorated over the years; it has virtually disappeared in Michigan and the nation.

outlined areas, many of which appear dubious.¹⁰⁵ Zürcher goes on to say that even putative requirements in what seem like traditional subjects (Western civilization or English literature) often turn out on examination to be diluted or imbued with sectarian politics.

The situation at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the flagship campus of the state system, thus in effect resembles the situation at Western, where the likelihood of students receiving anything resembling a traditional core education is small, as is the likelihood of any two students receiving anything like the same core education. Turning from the University of Michigan specifically to the question of required subjects generally, Zürcher also points out that even where courses are described as mandatory, students may plead numerous special exemptions. Thus the core curriculum has not only deteriorated over the years; it has virtually disappeared in Michigan and the nation. The NAS document concludes with a statement relevant to the state universities of Michigan:

A large majority [of American universities] have . . . chosen to disguise virtually unrestricted options behind a facade of structure afforded by what are now generally called “distribution requirements.” While distribution requirements demand that a student spread his or her course selections among groupings carrying labels like “the humanities,” “the social sciences,” and “the natural sciences,” the courses contained within them . . . are in fact so numerous as to make it nearly impossible to predict what subjects the recipient of a baccalaureate degree will end up taking or to conclude that adequate guidance is actually being given to students.¹⁰⁶

A memo from the General Education Council of Central Michigan University dated November 6, 1991, appears to show that this same problem not only exists, but is acknowledged, on the Mt. Pleasant campus. Discussing the University Program at CMU, the stated purpose of which is to constitute a core curriculum to be studied by all students, the memo declares that the Program has lost whatever coherence it might once have had. “Expectations [for the Program] have only partially been fulfilled in practice,” the memo states.¹⁰⁷ Conversations with CMU faculty indicate that little has changed in the nearly five years since the memo was directed to them and that, in some respects, the situation has worsened.

English departments stand at the core of the liberal arts curriculum. At both CMU and Saginaw Valley State University, the English departments have been debating (and enacting) what they call curricular reform. In both cases, however, the evidence strongly suggests a reform downward into ever less challenging concessions to popular culture and ideological extremism. A critic of the proposed changes at CMU writes that they would create even greater fragmentation of the English major than is the case in the existing (and by implication deficient) major: “The [new] plan,” the critic writes, “separates composition, critical theory, and the development of professional concerns from the reading of primary texts. It places the reading requirement fourth rather than first in the list of necessary elements of an English major.”¹⁰⁸ Descriptions of the “reformed” curriculum written by its advocates confirm the critic’s diagnosis: It incorporates the “diversity” movement, and it replaces well defined courses with courses in which the person doing the teaching would “focus on *any area of English studies* so long as students studied *current issues* in that area” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁹

The phrase “current issues” denotes in this case the postmodern and multicultural topics of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, denunciations of Western civilization and

attacks against free market capitalism. The history of such changes elsewhere suggests that these topics would quickly become more important than the primary texts even in those few courses where the primary texts are still used.¹¹⁰

The commentator on the CMU English curriculum went on to say that the proposed new English major seemed intent on disposing with literature in favor of so-called literary criticism. “Without a knowledge of primary texts [however], the student is hardly in a position to engage in criticism.”¹¹¹

At Saginaw Valley State University, a faculty critic of pending “reform” of English requirements proposed for a general education program complained in a memo that, “some students will end up reading only popular texts, only writing by women or about gender issues, or courses taught to reflect the teacher’s interests or politics.” (Notice that this writer could just as well have been responding to the CMU curriculum, a sign that the problems under discussion in these pages are not isolated.)

The SVSU critic wrote that in many cases, “the proposed courses are not courses in literature” but in various dimensions of popular and mass media culture. “One reason to require the study of literature,” the critic said, “is to move students to study relatively complex and insightful literary texts that they would otherwise ignore.” The writer sums up the import of the “new” curriculum in these words:

Pleasing students is, unfortunately, the name of the game, now and in the future. But the proposed [new] curriculum will redefine “pleasing.” Now students still have a choice—of teachers, times, and course topics. But all the current courses include predominantly major works which present high level challenges to cognition and interpretation. [In the new curriculum,] courses emphasizing movies and novels, nonprint media, popular literature, nonliterary writing, contemporary writing, and cultural ephemera will be offered more and more frequently.¹¹²

Both cases show the influence of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the dominant accreditation agency for English departments, and the source of virtually all the questionable pedagogies and theories which have so impacted the public schools in the last thirty years. NCATE’s influence is baleful and new agencies should be recruited to provide competition for its unsuccessful accreditation criteria.

V. Teacher Training Fails to Make the Grade

The simplest definition of a teacher is that he or she is someone who knows something sufficiently well to teach it to someone else. On the basis of this simple definition and referring to the argument so far, it is possible that college students intending to become

“Many Michigan teachers are not qualified to teach the subjects that they are assigned.”

“As for the value of education courses and degrees in the actual teaching of schoolchildren, there is no persuasive evidence that such studies have any pay-off whatever in the classroom.”

teachers might be under prepared for the task. The most fundamental of courses, freshman composition, no longer serves to establish higher literacy among entering college students, and the core curriculum, whereby students became cultured in the broad sense, has been abolished in favor of proliferating specialty courses. What does teacher training do to prepare students electing an education major? The answer seems to be—very little. This chapter argues that teacher education is affected by the same theories and instruction methods that have led to the decline of freshman composition and the core curriculum. Students in teacher education courses, who have not learned very much because of faulty instruction, take faulty instruction methods to their own teaching careers. They do not learn how to teach well.

The deterioration of teacher training has been closely linked with the erosion of a solid core curriculum in the state universities of Michigan. In January 1995, *The Detroit News* reported on its front page that “there is trouble at the head of Michigan’s classrooms, and it may get worse before it improves.” Remarkably, one-third of the prospective geography and health teachers “flunked their certification tests,” and “those taking biology and history exams fared only slightly better.” The article noted that “while nearly all passed a basic skills test in reading, writing and math,” the test is “so easy that it gives the public no assurance of any level of competency.”¹¹³ In September 1996, *The Detroit News* again reported that “many Michigan teachers are not qualified to teach the subjects that they are assigned.”¹¹⁴ In a related story, the same newspaper reported how large numbers of Michigan high school students, taking the newly instated academic proficiency test, failed to demonstrate their academic proficiency.¹¹⁵

There is a discrepancy between the way schools of education represent themselves and the performance of their graduates. Many Michigan teachers (in the vast majority of cases through no fault of their own) lack basic knowledge. This reflects, in part, the disappearance of *knowledge* from the general curriculum but also, in part, the deterioration of teacher-training curricula.

In a paper presented at the meeting of the Michigan Academy in 1995, Robert Money of Lake Superior State University reminded his listeners that, one hundred years ago, the knowledge associated with being a teacher might be recorded briefly in two or three pages of front matter in a good grammar book.¹¹⁶ This did not indicate a lack of sophistication, as indicated by expectations implicit in nineteenth century textbooks.¹¹⁷ In its very brevity, nineteenth century teacher training got it right. What was important was that the teacher should *know something* about the subjects being taught. Today, the assumption seems to be that teachers are not qualified until they have completed a lengthy and complex program of teacher-training and education theory courses. To finish their program in a timely manner, prospective teachers often opt out of taking more substantial courses in their major area(s) of study.

“As for the value of education courses and degrees in the actual teaching of schoolchildren,” writes Thomas Sowell in *Inside American Education*, “there is no persuasive evidence that such studies have any pay-off whatever in the classroom.”¹¹⁸

Michigan State University’s course catalog lists a typical array of education courses. Using catch words from the theoretical discourse which one encounters frequently today in schools of education, the catalog describes Teacher Education 150, “Reflections on Learning,” as a course which focuses on “students’ experiences as learners in comparison with psychological, sociological, and anthropological theories and assumptions about learning and teaching in and out of school.” TE 250, “Human Diversity, Power, and Opportunity in Social Institutions,”

aims at a “comparative study of schools and other social institutions,” and includes material on the “social construction maintenance of diversity and inequality [*sic*],” and “political and social consequences for individuals and groups.” TE 322, “Methods of Teaching,” promises guidance in the “selection of instructional techniques based on teacher values and belief systems, and learner needs and characteristics.” And TE 401, “Teaching of Subject Matter to Diverse Learners,” encourages pupils to “construct subject-specific meanings.”¹¹⁹

Central Michigan University’s course catalog likewise diverts prospective teachers from substantive subjects. Its description of Education and Health Sciences 101, “Career and Self-Exploration,” consists of cliches drawn from popular psychology. The course places emphasis on the development of “self-awareness, career awareness, and academic awareness leading to a comprehensive career plan.” The widespread self-esteem movement has clearly influenced this course, as the emphasis on “self” indicates. EHS 102, “Academic Learning Skills,” “provides information, materials and practice to assist students in improving study skills.” EHS 103 concerns “reading skills.” These two courses might be substantive, but given the close affiliation between schools of education and English departments, and the ambiguous ways in which English departments now define literacy and competency, a high degree of substance cannot be assumed. (See the discussion of reading and writing textbooks below.) And out of proportion to its relative importance to teacher training, the course listings under Secondary Education include four separate courses devoted to driver training in the high schools.¹²⁰

This sampling gives an idea of what the schools of education offer. What is the meaning of this “educationese”?

The conclusion that may be drawn is that the prospective teachers of our children appear not to be encouraged to acquire deep and substantive knowledge. Rigorous content in the traditional liberal arts is rejected in favor of the cultivation of personal impression, emotion, opinion, and other subjective states. The focus on the self, on the subjectivity of the prospective teacher, is striking. Is there a connection between education studies and the performance of Michigan teachers on accreditation exams? It would be surprising if there were not a connection.

The course description of Michigan State’s TE 322, for example, suggests that the teacher’s “values and belief systems” (whatever those might be) should play a role in “the selection of instructional techniques.” Central Michigan’s EHS 101 is apparently devoted to “self-exploration.” The course description suggests both a troubling emphasis on egocentrism and an adherence to the cultural relativism typical of the postmodern curriculum. (Cultural relativism is the theory that all moral values are equal and interchangeable; cultural relativism is one of the assumptions both of multiculturalism and diversity.) That curriculum has been disastrous for recent generations of college students, as argued by Sowell and Cheney and as suggested by the facts reported in *Recruiting Trends* and *Learning by Degrees*. Those students have not achieved the intellectual performance levels of previous generations.

Michigan State’s TE 401 suggests the doctrine of “constructivism,” which claims that knowledge is not objective, to be found by a careful investigation of an actually existing external world, but subjective, or made up by every individual according to his or her putatively unique needs, and susceptible to whimsical alteration. Constructivist themes often seem to be combined with Marxist themes in contemporary education discourse, so that the

Rigorous content in the traditional liberal arts is rejected in favor of the cultivation of personal impression, emotion, opinion, and other subjective states.

existing social system is described as an oppressive construction in whose deconstruction teachers will need to participate.

Furthermore, the terms “diverse,” “diversity,” “ethnic,” multi-ethnic,” and “multicultural” appear in school of education course descriptions frequently and in apparently arbitrary contexts. This is a sign of what Thomas Sowell identifies as the school of education’s extraordinary “susceptibility to fads, especially to nonintellectual and anti-intellectual fads.”¹²¹

Additional evidence of the apparent affinity for “nonintellectual fads” comes from a memorandum describing the rationale and structure of a proposed CMU course listed as Elementary Education 305, “Issues in Multicultural Education.” The “rationale” that accompanies the description of the course contains biased assumptions: “The importance of preparing future generations for a multicultural world is increasing. Due to the rapid growth of diversity within the United States, it is essential that educators provide learners with reflective experiences for life in a multicultural society. In so doing, it is important to enhance their multicultural skills [etc.]”¹²² (Compare the similarity of the language in this description to that in the Michigan Academy paper on “Enfleshment” cited in chapter 2. The presumptions in both are identical.)

None of these statements is verifiable. They appear to be a subjective judgment expressed in dogmatic language designed to appear as though the subject matter of the course is the result of some experiential or scientific or clinical consensus. The course syllabus stipulates one purpose of ELE 305 would be the development of “attitudes, values, and behavior supportive of cultural diversity, differences, and the welfare of society.” The designers of this particular course do not seem to view multiculturalism or multicultural education as an *issue*, as something to be debated. They appear to see it as a dogma which teachers-in-training must support, regardless of its merits. The bibliography attached to the syllabus makes it apparent that students will have little opportunity to inform themselves about criticism of multiculturalism. A one-page article by columnist John Leo is the only identifiably critical piece in the three pages of single spaced references. The course would be less susceptible to charges of propaganda if it was balanced by another course in which deficiencies and limitations of multiculturalism could be rigorously studied. No such course exists and there is little incentive for existing faculty to propose one.

Lack of balance in course content has extended beyond special courses into the totality of course offerings. The same assertions turn up, for example, in Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, and Hall’s *The Foundations of American Education*, a widely used textbook for the entry level school of education course on Michigan campuses. The book tells prospective teachers that the “melting-pot” theory of cultural assimilation is “inappropriate” for today’s schools; “institutional racism abounds;” and “multicultural education absolutely must address the significance of pluralism and group heritages.”¹²³ The emphasis on groups and on collective values echoes Marxist themes. *The Foundations* devotes much space to subjects like “group heritages,” but never discusses the centrality of the individual to the ethics of the Western tradition.

The Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, and Hall textbook is a compendium, to use Sowell’s term, of politically correct nonintellectual fads. In the complex jargon of education rhetoric, this textbook rehearses the ideological positions that would-be teachers must apparently endorse as the *bona fides* of their profession. An example of how the teacher education system pushes students into espousing such positions is the entrance examination for the School of Education at CMU; students have been refused entry to the school because they failed to give what amount to politically acceptable responses during the examination.¹²⁴

The index of *The Foundations* reveals multiple entries under “cultural bias in textbooks,” “cultural diversity,” “divergent thinking,” “dominant culture,” “racism,” “sexism,” and “self-concept of teachers,” but none under “knowledge.” A section titled “Reflections: Working against Cultural Bias in Textbooks” declares that “a vast number of textbooks currently used in American schools do not accurately reflect the cultural diversity of the United States” and goes on to list nine steps for recognizing “cultural bias in the forms of omission, distortion, and factual error” in prospective classroom reading assignments. But, as *The Foundations* defines “diversity” as a system of numerical representation based on skin color and ethnicity, its imputation of “bias” in school texts is itself biased.

The Orwellian implications of this “reflection” are hard to avoid. Nor can one easily escape the message: An important duty of school teachers is to act on behalf of politically correct ideologues as culture police.

The Foundations contains long passages on “self-esteem,” “grouping,” “tracking,” and other topics—tendentious in themselves or treated tendentiously. This book makes it clear to teachers-in-training that they will expend much effort in their role similar to that of a social worker. The book contains no explicit statement to the effect that teachers must be knowledgeable in areas outside education theory.¹²⁵

Another widely used book, Martha Rapp Ruddell’s *Teaching Content Reading and Writing*, is aimed at teaching teachers-in-training how to instruct their future students in reading and writing. Ruddell advocates what she calls “writing across the curriculum,” which is concerned, she writes, “mainly with *process* . . . rather than [with] writing as a polished product.”¹²⁶ She is, in other words, advocating the implementation of the process approach in elementary and secondary schools—something which began a decade or more ago. As do many contemporary education experts, Ruddell consistently disparages traditional approaches to reading and writing. In doing so she ignores the fact that as educators have abandoned traditional approaches since the mid-1960s, the performance of college-bound high school graduates on the verbal SAT has consistently dropped. According to Ruddell:

Most secondary teachers have little knowledge or training in “phonics” or pronunciation rules, and very few have any interest in gaining such. Rightfully so: The days of attempting to teach adolescents to “Crack the Code” thankfully are long past. So, it is unreasonable to expect that middle school and secondary teachers are equipped to, or *should*, teach pronunciation rules and the like in their classrooms.¹²⁷

But how can the teachers make this judgment if they do not know anything about the method here being rejected by Ruddell for them? This is an example of the biases that appear frequently in postmodern pedagogy. In effect, Ruddell is urging her readers to decide an issue without first acquiring knowledge about it. Is this really what the ancient art of *teaching* is about? Ruddell’s index is likewise revealing. There are multiple entries under “cooperative learning,” “diversity in the classroom,” “female studental needs of,” “gender differences,” “how schools shortchange girls,” “process writing,” “theoretical teacher,” and “whole language approach,” but none under competency or grammar. Although there are many entries involving the word “literacy,” Ruddell gives no definition of the term itself.

School of education course descriptions and widely used textbooks like *The Foundations* and *Teaching Content Reading and Writing* reveal a focus on fads, intellectually

What course descriptions and textbooks often label as “cognitive skills” are really forms of passive reliance on emotion and are therefore not cognitive in the traditional understanding of the term.

dubious ideas, and unjustified emphasis of trivial subjects like driver education and “media resources,” whose subject matter could probably be covered by a single short lecture or reading assignment. What such course descriptions and textbooks often label as “cognitive skills” are really forms of passive reliance on emotion and are therefore not cognitive in the traditional understanding of the term.

A recent book entitled *Ed School Follies*¹²⁸ confirms these inferences. Its author, Rita Kramer, spent a year visiting schools of education across the country. Kramer records that the attitudes identified by critics of contemporary teacher training like Sowell are ubiquitous, so much so that schools of education have become virtually indistinguishable from one another. Kramer visited two influential schools of education in Michigan, at Eastern Michigan University and at Michigan State University. There, as elsewhere in the country, Kramer discovered that education courses consisted in the main of preachments and sloganeering, with very little requirement that students demonstrate knowledge in core subjects. A disdain for knowledge among education theorists is one of the tragic themes of Kramer’s account.

At Michigan State University, an administrator of the College of Education explained to Kramer that the aim of the “Multiple Perspectives Program” of teacher education was “to foster personal and social responsibility, to learn to work with others in egalitarian ways, respecting diversity and integrating everyone for the future of our country. There has to be an emphasis on acquiring new information,” the administrator told Kramer, “not just absorbing the old, not a body of content, of facts.”¹²⁹

The language of many of MSU’s Teacher Education course descriptions matches the administrator’s language. Classes cover such areas as “connections between schools and diversity, inequality, and power in society,” “cultural diversity in education,” “developing effective multicultural curricula for all students,” and “issues of teaching in schools with multinational student populations.”¹³⁰ The multicultural vocabulary is omnipresent and repetitious. In the “Action Research Seminar,” Kramer got the opportunity to witness a presentation given by the professor which contained “an overhead projection of a vast outline made up largely of phrases like ‘engaged-interactive.’”¹³¹ Kramer narrates the scene as follows:

The professor moves along the outline, repeating out loud what is there for the eye to see—“contributive strategies to norms of interaction” and “impact on learning context of second-order learning strategies,” which seem to mean (one can’t be sure) bringing things out in the open and clarifying what you think so it can be examined and tested. With each phrase he reads, he turns and looks at the class significantly.

[The students] know all the “right” words—“not motivated to learn . . . inhibition to writing . . . reluctant to answer.” They talk about the problem of “too much negative feedback.” How far away all this is from any body of learning, all this talk about the nature of the learning process, the relation of the learner to the learning community. What about *what* is being learned?¹³²

In an Eastern Michigan University class called “The Social Aspects of Teaching,” Kramer attended a lecture titled “The Hidden Agenda.” The professor claimed, according to Kramer, that all education up until the (presumably enlightened) present has contained a

“Hidden Agenda,” that is to say, a secret program of power whereby the rich manipulate culture to oppress the poor. An example of this, supplied by the professor, is the classic children’s story *Tootle*, about a train that tries to leave the track and ends up in trouble. The teacher supplied the students with an article from *Harvard Education Review* which submits this tale to an explicitly Marxist analysis:

In eighteen pages [passed out to the students in photocopy], the story is exhaustively [treated] as a “picture of society . . . meritocratic . . . a class system” which “works because responsible authorities make decisions and because everyone else follows the rules.” There’s a good bit about “the State . . . conspiracy . . . surveillance” and *Tootle* as “a worker, not a decision maker” who has “to stay in his place without question” and not “presume to choose his own course or destiny,” rewarded in the end for conforming to his manipulators.¹³³

When one student questioned this lopsided interpretation, the professor cut her short for defending “meritocracy.”¹³⁴ When the class broke up, after a lengthy discussion during which it became clear that the students were resisting the professor’s view of reality, the professor remarked to Kramer with puzzlement on the “hostility”¹³⁵ that he seemed to inspire.

In a course on “Children’s Literature,” Hans Christian Andersen’s story *The Ugly Duckling* is treated similarly to *Tootle*. The professor impugns the story because after the duckling became a swan, he “never questioned the system, never tried to better the lot of the others, the lower classes, once he made it.”¹³⁶ When students raise questions about the teacher education system, their questions are too often unwanted or ignored or attacked as racist or reactionary. When students do reject overt political indoctrination or nonsensical material in the classroom, they are often insufficiently educated and too inarticulate to do so cogently, as Kramer shows. It is difficult for them to propose any alternative to the status quo.

What the education professors teach inevitably shows up in K-12 public schools. One of Michigan education theorists’ recent contributions to the public schools’ pedagogical repertoire is the “whole language” approach to reading instruction, which treats alphabetic writing in English as though it were ideographic writing in Chinese, and “invented spelling,” which effectively discourages children from learning the simple but invaluable skill of how to spell.¹³⁷

Author James V. Hoffman wrote about the purpose of the “whole language” method in an article in *Language Arts*, the nationally circulated journal of classroom English teachers and English educationists:

Whole language is not so much about method or philosophy as it is about power. It is a movement about empowerment—about who makes decisions and on what basis. Literacy empowers societies. Literacy empowers individuals. The learner on the path to literacy is learning about that power. Teachers who are disempowered themselves as professionals cannot empower students as learners. Fragmented curricula, mastery learning, skills-based management systems, controlled vocabulary readers, criterion-references testing, and synthetic phonics are not the status quo because they produce better results than anything else. These features are in a prominent position, I believe, because they provide the educational system (i.e., the bureaucracy) with a mechanism to control what goes on in classrooms.¹³⁸

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This passage suggests that much of contemporary education theory results in tragic indifference to the needs of students. Hoffman's focus on power and the empowerment of teachers suggests how motifs from Marxism tend to surface in the discourse of "cutting-edge" pedagogical theory. Concerning "fragmented curricula," nothing fragments a curriculum like delinking reading and writing from the acquisition of grammar and other fundamentals. As columnist Joan Beck recently explained, in a *Detroit Free Press* opinion piece, one reason why the nation's public schools produce such a disappointing level of student achievement is that education experts "have so complicated . . . reading . . . that they make it seem impossibly difficult." Beck urges that children will master reading and writing quickly as long as they "are first taught the relationships between sounds and letters—phonics—in a way that stresses the joy of discovery and mastery."¹³⁹

Hoffman, as a "whole-language" apologist, fails to note that *he* is the bureaucracy about which he complains. He does not allow for the possibility that he and others with similar beliefs pose a danger because they use their position in the academy to impose narrow sectarian doctrines on the public schools without public referendum.

Michigan schools of education also produced the controversial Mandatory Academic Core Curriculum for the K-12 public schools. It was rejected by the Michigan State Board of Education because it was characterized by education bureaucracy jargon and substituted trendy theory for proven methods.¹⁴⁰

But what gets rejected at the state level can still turn up in local school districts. An example comes from Isabella County. A story in the Isabella County *Morning Sun* (September 18, 1995) reported that the Mt. Pleasant public schools had teamed up with education faculty from Education and English at Central Michigan University to "implement new teaching methods and educational techniques." Among these "methods and techniques," according to the CMU professors who would supervise the program, were "cooperative learning," "whole language approaches" to reading and writing, and the "implementing [of] multicultural units." The *Morning Sun* headline labeled all of this as a plan "to innovate education."

"Innovative" is an unfortunate word to describe the Mt. Pleasant/CMU project, which mimicks ideas that failed elsewhere. A few days before the *Morning Sun* article, a story appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (September 13) detailing a state-sponsored assessment of California's public schools. The authors of the California document urged a return to basics in the teaching of reading and other areas of the public school curriculum. "Labeling a nearly decade long experiment in progressive teaching methods a failure, a state task force . . . will call on California schools to resume teaching phonics, spelling and other basic reading skills," the *Times* article said. The California report specifically addressed the "whole language approach" to the teaching of reading and writing, describing it as fundamentally erroneous in its assumptions about what literacy is and how children acquire it. More recently, acting on the report, the California legislature ordered the state's public schools to ditch the discredited methods and return to a traditional, phonics-oriented, language instruction program.

The California report accords with the experience of school districts across the country that have adopted so-called innovative curricula, including "whole language," only to discover that elementary school children as late as the fourth and fifth grades have not mastered even the rudiments of reading and writing and are, for practical purposes, functionally illiterate. This is what happened in Houston, which adopted a uniform "whole language" reading and writing curriculum in the late 1980s. In 1991, as reported in *The Atlantic Monthly*

(December 1994), “eight elementary schools asked the school district to allow them to return to phonics-based instruction.”

If the officials of the Mt. Pleasant public schools knew of the facts about “innovative” curricula when they adopted them at the urging of the CMU professors, they remained unconvinced by them. Probably they were unaware of them, and the education professors did not disabuse them of their unawareness. The Isabella County victims of this are elementary and secondary school students who themselves have no say in what happens to their education. A story in the *Isabella County Herald* for September 18, 1996, a year after the inauguration of the “innovative” curriculum in Mt. Pleasant, reported that “less than half of area 11th graders” scored high enough on the verbal portion of Michigan’s new proficiency tests to pass. In Mt. Pleasant, according to the *Herald*, only 48.8% of 11th graders passed the reading portion of the test and only 43.5% passed the writing portion.

In 1994 the statewide Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests showed that students in the state’s public schools do poorly in basic skills like reading and math. So do their teachers,¹⁴¹ but not likely through any fault of their own. Much of the blame seems to lie with their college instruction. Their college instruction is so impoverished in the area of fundamentals because they have little chance to learn methods other than the ones approved by their professors, and because of the demand that they take so many inconsequential courses which prevent them from devoting more time to their specialties such as English, history, or math. The 1996 tests showed no significant improvement. (A rise of only two percent in reading scores did occur among private school students, many of whom were taking the exams for the first time.)¹⁴²

If all college students need to be better educated than they at present are, then this is no less true of would-be teachers. The nebulous content and questionable intellectual quality of many education courses appears to severely diminish teacher preparedness, as does the deterioration of the traditional core curriculum. But the problem cannot be solved merely by having teachers take fewer education courses and sign up for more classes in the traditional liberal arts. Many of the literature and composition and history and foreign language departments are affected by the same theories that have damaged teacher education. Educational quality will hardly improve with quantity. Reform of a more fundamental sort is needed. The education that the state universities of Michigan offer will improve only when there is a true restoration of humane learning.

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VI. “Sifting a Learnt Tradition”

The previous chapters have illustrated the specific ways in which the curricular offerings of the state universities of Michigan have been affected by trendy, ideological teaching methods and curricula that run counter to the requirements of a real education. This chapter reminds readers what a real education is and why it can only be traditional, dealing in the material validated by centuries of historical experience as essential to an understanding of human nature, life and the world.

The previous sections have documented the regrettable condition into which education in the state universities of Michigan has lapsed. Freshman composition—formerly the indispensable foundation of an undergraduate’s educational experience—is now commonly devoted to nonliteracy and to spurious forms of moral liberation. The foreign language requirement is nearly nonexistent and foreign language instruction, even if a particular major requires it or a student desires it, is increasingly subject to the same problems that have adversely affected freshman composition. The old liberal arts core curriculum has vanished. But what would higher education be if this had not occurred? In other words, what is the normative character of higher education? If the normative character could be established, the direction of reform would already have been indicated. A simple, commonly understood definition of higher education is required in the debate over the desired content of a curriculum suitable for a democratic society rooted in an historical tradition and wedded to the ideas of truth and accuracy embodied in the arts and sciences.

The late Allan Bloom, author of the best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind*, once wrote that a college education was civilization’s last and best chance to shape the typical American eighteen-year-old.¹⁴³ Examination of the current system of undergraduate education found in the state universities of Michigan shows that eighteen-year-olds are not presented with a common core curriculum that will initiate them into higher culture and give them a shared vocabulary and body of intellectual experience. Rather, students encounter a bewildering array of “choices” without having learned the criteria by which to make good choices. This is the paradox of the existing curriculum. It is not plausible that persons in need of acquiring information and skills are in a good position to choose the information or skills they need to acquire.

Knowledge is the prerequisite to choice, not vice versa. Coupled with declining standards and the widespread deformation of course content, the existing system does not prepare students for an American society they are likely to encounter in their future. It will not prepare them to function well in a society based on law and rooted in tradition or in a technological order decreasingly mechanical and increasingly cybernetic in which traditional knowledge (such as that embodied by grammar) is more essential to the economic and social success of individuals than ever before.

The results of “window shopping” for a curriculum are demonstrably poor. The lack of intellectual rigor is evident not only when these graduates try to get a job, but once they have been on the job. Many of the documented comments by employers who hire new graduates from Michigan’s public universities are not flattering and suggest severe problems with the system. (See *Recruiting Trends*.) The poor performance of teachers trained and certified at schools of education—Michigan State University, Central Michigan University, and Eastern Michigan University—is also disturbing.

Relieving requirements and dismantling the traditional liberal arts curriculum has not led to an increase in the knowledge possessed by graduating seniors. It has not liberated, but has tragically shackled, students in the chains of ignorance. Flattering students by constructing a system in which they “select” from a large array of courses is thus tantamount to degrading their college experience and depriving them of knowledge.

The postmodern curriculum breaks with tradition and in many cases attacks tradition. The accusations against the traditions of American society heard today in English departments, and in the various special studies programs such as women’s studies and ethnic

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studies, is loud and of little intellectual substance. The implicit message of the existing system seems to be that students should value no knowledge over any other knowledge and that they should seek no determinable relation between the departments of knowledge. (Modern humanities faculties talk about “interdisciplinarity,” but demonstrate little understanding of how one discipline is related to another.) In attacking tradition and undermining the coordination of the disciplines, the “postmodern” curriculum violates a principle articulated by Camille Paglia that “universities should not be brokers of the contemporary.” She adds

The purpose of education is to open the remote past to students, so that they can learn from the voluminous human record of mistakes and triumphs. Professors have no business telling students about the present. The students *are* the present, and month-by-month, they are creating the future. Stop oppressing them with exhausted paradigms of the recent past. Each time a professor sets foot in a classroom, he or she is already history.¹⁴⁴

Paglia thus agrees with economist and sociologist F. A. Hayek who, in explaining how knowledge arises, asserted that “most knowledge...is obtained...in the continuous process of *sifting a learnt tradition*.”¹⁴⁵ Paglia’s statement is also consistent with William Bennett’s words in his recent book *The Devaluing of America*. Bennett notes that:

We are a part and a product of Western civilization. That our society was founded on such principles as justice, liberty, government with the consent of the governed, and equality under the law is the result of ideas descended directly from the Western civilization—Enlightenment England and France, Renaissance Florence, and Periclean Athens. These ideas are the glue that binds together our pluralistic nation.¹⁴⁶

Bennett goes on to say that “it is simply impossible for students to understand their society without studying its intellectual legacy.”¹⁴⁷ In chapter 4 we cited the words of sociologist James Q. Wilson, who writes fondly and respectfully about the freshman seminar that he was required to take that introduced him to the West’s intellectual legacy. These statements by Paglia, Hayek, Bennett, and Wilson indicate what a genuine higher education really is. Students today deserve a chance to acquire the same education, but, in the state universities of Michigan as they are currently constituted, that chance is slim.

VII. A Few Encouraging Signs

This chapter offers a survey of events and ideas from Michigan and elsewhere which provide clear models for rectifying the problems reviewed in the previous chapters. The trivialization and downgrading of the undergraduate curriculum is not confined to Michigan but is a nationwide problem. In some other states, the problem of the downgraded university has already been recognized and a few people have begun to deal with it. Michigan can look to their example.

The trivialization and downgrading of the undergraduate curriculum is not confined to Michigan but is a nationwide problem.

Can the state colleges and universities of Michigan improve what they teach and the way they teach it? The prospect of reforming and restoring humane learning in our public universities will prove a daunting task, but more than one observer has suggested how it could be done. Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, for example, calls for a number of bold steps: "Restoring a core curriculum, reducing the number of peripheral courses and programs, cutting back on the number of administrators, reversing the process by which liberal arts colleges have been transformed into universities, eliminating the category of teaching assistant, and reinstating the old prohibitions against indoctrination in the classroom."¹⁴⁸ Many of these steps deserve consideration. There are, however, a few reforms which seem particularly urgent. These reforms need to be made together and they have implications beyond the state universities. Many problems in Michigan's public K-12 schools are directly related to the problems in the state universities. To correct problems in our K-12 schools we must reform the universities.

The centrality of a traditional reading list to liberal education has already been mentioned. An important part of restoring the core curriculum in the state universities of Michigan is establishing, on one or more campuses, a well defined great books program.

Next door to Michigan, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, recent events ought to encourage those who fear that satisfactory reform is impossible. On May 17, 1995, in what the National Association of Scholars describes as "a landmark in the history of higher education reform,"¹⁴⁹ the Academic Program and Curriculum Committee of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee "approved a certificate program in the study of the liberal arts through the Great Books."¹⁵⁰ The driving force behind this program, Associate Professor of Classics David Mulroy, faced strong opposition from established interests who opposed his proposal because of its "Eurocentrism." Mulroy contended that dilution of the liberal arts curriculum had reached the point where something needed to be done to restore integrity to the educational experience. Mulroy says, "Among other things, a Great Books approach suggests that a student's most important job is to grasp the author's intended meaning. . . . I found that this aspect of the program was enthusiastically supported by a number of students who in effect had run screaming from the courses taught by feminists, multiculturalists, and Afrocentrists."¹⁵¹

The great books Program, as Mulroy conceives it, challenges students with specific *knowledge* at the same time it teaches them the universally applicable skill of *understanding difficult arguments*. Remember that according to the literacy survey called *Learning by Degrees*, the typical level of "literateness" of four-year college graduates is regrettably low. Remember also that, according to *Recruiting Trends*, employers consistently say that a rigorous liberal arts education is one of the best forms of preparation for the professional workforce.

One of the first things that needs to be done in the state universities of Michigan is to institute Mulroy's great books Program or something like it on one or more of the larger campuses on a trial basis. The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor does have a great books program, although it is not central to nor prominent within the curriculum. Even so, it might be as good a model as Mulroy's. Central Michigan University, because it is centrally located, because it draws its enrollment statewide, and because it turns out 60 percent of the state's public school teachers, would be a good place to implement one or another of the existing great books models.

The program should initially involve students whose overall performance could be tracked to show how they do outside the program. Their performance would then be

Central Michigan University, because it is centrally located, because it draws its enrollment statewide, and because it turns out 60 percent of the state's public school teachers, would be a good place to implement one or another of the existing great books models.

compared with that of other students in the prevailing curricula. Tracking these students is critical to the success of the experiment and would enable the making of a powerful case for whichever method of instruction produced the best results. A lack of accountability characterizes many of the new humanities curricula and programs instituted over the last twenty years. No reliable evidence has been found that indicates that these new curricula and programs were inaugurated for the purpose of discovering whether they produce educationally valid results. The whole array of postmodern and multicultural special interest programs seem to have been imposed on the universities by faculty demands, without safeguards to protect students from peculiar political agendas. They have become established in our academic institutions without reference to marketplace demand and with inadequate review of their consequences.

Freshman composition is in need of reform. Today's teaching methods have not produced students with superior communication and reasoning skills. The process approach is used in over 90 percent of the freshman composition classes in the state universities of Michigan,¹⁵² but its success or failure has not been submitted to empirical verification. A public trial run of an alternative approach, with subsequent tracking of student performance, would be extraordinarily valuable.

Peter T. Koper, the associate professor of English at Central Michigan University whose view of freshman composition was cited in chapter 2, has outlined the details of such a trial run. Koper regularly teaches a version of freshman composition which stresses remediation in grammar, intensive practice in reading, and careful instruction in both informal logic and the use of evidence. This traditional version of freshman composition is very different from the process approach to the course. Koper generally teaches two classes of freshman composition in a semester. With 25 students in each class, this is 50 students per semester and 100 students per year—enough students for a valid test. If Koper's 100 students were paired with 100 students from process approach classrooms, and if both groups were tracked and regularly tested throughout the remainder of their four or five years of undergraduate studies, this would offer an empirical test of the comparative value of the contrasting pedagogical approaches. With sufficient publicity, the results of the experiment would permit conclusive statements to be made about the validity of one approach or the other.

Koper, like Steve Kogan and Heather Mac Donald, believes that students drilled rigorously in the thinking habits that go along with intensive reading and writing will exhibit a higher level of performance in all other areas of their scholarly activity than students who have been taught by the process approach or instructed by their peers. The NCTE *Standards*, which might be called the Bible of the contemporary language arts, stakes the claim that, "through their writing, editing, and revising experiences, students [will] come to understand that a composition may never be truly finished."¹⁵³ The failure to set goals implicit in the NCTE claim may lead directly to students who never achieve high-level linguistic mastery. Heather Mac Donald and Steve Kogan have shown in their articles that the process approach to writing instruction produces poor results.

Koper claims that he, on the other hand, teaches his students to write linguistically competent, argumentatively sound, intellectually significant essays. And Koper is willing to submit his own theory to a public contest. The only cost of Koper's experiment would be the tracking and testing of the two hundred students, and verifying the methods by which they were instructed. This would be money wisely spent whether it came from state funds or from another source.

The reform of freshman composition and the reestablishment of a specific and challenging core curriculum go together. They both need to occur at the same time if undergraduate education is to become more meaningful and effective.

The reform of freshman composition and the reestablishment of a specific and challenging core curriculum go together. They both need to occur at the same time if undergraduate education is to become more meaningful and effective. Teacher education, too, would potentially benefit enormously from such a reform.

There are a number of examples of this simultaneous restoration in addition to Mulroy's in Wisconsin. At Boston University, the curriculum integrates instruction in writing with intensive and substantial reading in the required four-semester "humanities core course." The *National Review College Guide* reports that, among the required readings in this ambitious two-year course, are "the two seminal strands of the Western tradition," including the Hebrew scriptures, Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, the Gospels, and St. Paul, with non-Western texts like the *Baghavat Gita* and Lao-Tzu's *Analects*, added both to honor other traditions and to show the differences between "the West and the rest." Columbia University's Great Books curriculum likewise ties the cultivation of mastery in expression with acquisition of a core of substantial knowledge, and here too we find Plato, Aristotle, Isaiah, Matthew, Augustine, Dante, Machiavelli, and other great writers.

Michigan's Hillsdale College, like Boston University and Columbia, integrates a challenging reading list with its composition instruction, using texts drawn from the same canon of great books that supplies similar courses elsewhere. All of these courses recognize that language acquisition, from its rudimentary beginnings in infancy through its higher cultivation is at least in part imitative, and that it is mainly through confronting the great models of argumentation and the clearest demonstrations of inference that students will learn how to argue and how to infer. For the purposes of these courses, literacy is not "constructed" by each individual, but learned by example. These courses also recognize the link between knowledge and the ability to express oneself. This contrasts sharply with the overwhelming majority of freshman composition courses in the universities of Michigan, which maintain a minimal connection between reading and writing.

A specific model for how to integrate writing and the great books has been offered by Tracy Lee Simmons, who teaches the classics in translation at a college where modern pedagogies prevail.¹⁵⁴ Simmons tells the story of one of his students who had had run into a friend in the bookstore while purchasing the required texts—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, and others. "You're lucky to read the old stuff," the student's friend told her, complaining of what *she* had to read. She then pointed to slick editions of Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and even *The Silence of the Lambs*. She had viewed the film *The Silence of the Lambs* three times and didn't understand why she now had to read the novel. Simmons also failed to understand why the student had to read it.

Simmons' anecdote rebuts the "relevancy" argument used by professors seeking to abolish or diminish traditional education on the grounds that it does not speak to the supposed needs of contemporary students. Indeed, many students do not seem to accept the argument. Simmons goes on to describe how he began his course with the *Meditations* by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. "This brief collection of thoughts, impressions, and anecdotes occupied a niche amongst educated readers until two or three generations ago," Simmons writes, and it hardly seems "to fit the current cultural environment."¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Simmons' students responded positively to the assignment, and Simmons soon found that the *Meditations* enjoyed a currency among those in the student

body who had taken the course. Written work in response to the *Meditations* was remarkably engaged suggesting that this very traditional reading assignment had helped students find the inspiration for genuine intellectual work and reasoned personal assessment.¹⁵⁶

Such reactions are consistent with recent work on the history of literacy showing that the degree of literacy of a society is heavily dependent on *what* people read rather than the mere fact *that* they read or are *able* to read. Literacy is a qualitative phenomenon related to the ability to make inferences from densely packed ideas and arguments, a feat which involves the possession of a shared body of knowledge, a point made by the authors of *Learning by Degrees*. Literary texts have traditionally supplied the arena in which young people acquire and hone such skills. “In our time,” wrote Allan Bloom, “the study of texts is particularly needful”; and this is because today more than ever, we require that “purging of acquired prejudices and of all the categories of thought and speech derived from contemporary or recent philosophy” which only the traditional can give us.¹⁵⁷

The author’s previous research has argued that unless students are urged to submit to an intensive program of difficult reading—what used to be called college-level reading—they will never develop the type of critical acumen of which Bloom speaks. (See the author’s article, “Epistemological Correctness in English 101,” scheduled to be published in *Academic Questions*, Winter 1997.)

What teachers teach ought to be consistent with what centuries of historical experience has shown to be effective in developing the higher cognitive capacities of young adults. Young people should sift the learnt tradition (in Hayek’s concise phrase). However, this is too seldom the case. On campuses where time-proven content and methods are discouraged, reform is needed to reverse the trend of declining literacy and cognitive skills.

Charles Sykes notes in *Profscam* that the thirty-year trend in higher education has been to have professors teach less and less: “At the University of Illinois, only slightly more than 50 faculty members in the Economics Department taught even two courses in the fall of 1987. . . . At the highly ranked University of Michigan, some top-salaried professors teach so few classes that—figuring in university breaks and frequent holidays—they are paid nearly \$1,000 an hour for their contact with students.”¹⁵⁸

A recent story in *Barron’s* makes a similar point: “Productivity at colleges,” writes author Jonathan R. Laing, “could be boosted materially by a greater emphasis on teaching and imposition of heavier teaching loads.”¹⁵⁹ Further, as Hillsdale College President George Roche observes, “On average, academic salaries rose faster than the rate of inflation every year during the 1980s; an assistant professor was making well over \$40,000.”¹⁶⁰

At publicly financed universities, what are taxpayers, parents, and students getting from their investment of time and money? Certainly not as much teaching as in former times. Teaching seems to be de-emphasized in hiring and promotion, and in its place, research is apparently what the public is paying for. But much of what is called research in the humanities is of questionable quality. Laing notes that “many papers in academic journals are stupefying in their pedantry and irrelevance.”¹⁶¹ Roche lists the following titles as representative of papers delivered at a recent convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA), the umbrella organization for English and other literature professors:

“Many papers in academic journals are stupefying in their pedantry and irrelevance.”

The domination of the existing liberal arts faculties by ideologues suggests that a real result of tenure is to prevent entry into the profession by those who do not espouse the reigning orthodoxy.

- “The Sodomitical Tourist”;
- “Victorian Underwear and Representations of the Female Body”;
- “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”;
- “Is Alice Still in Phallus Land?”;
- “Strategies for Teaching a Feminist Political Latin American Culture Course”;
- “The Lesbian Phallus: Or Does Heterosexuality Exist?”;
- “Self-Consuming Fictions: The Dialectics of Cannibalism in Recent Caribbean Narratives”;
- “Assume the Position: Pluralist Ideology and Gynocriticism”;
- “Personal Experience Stories of Amazonized Enchanted Beings”; and
- “Gender and Sexual Relationships in the Great Beyond.”¹⁶²

Sykes, too, calls attention to the nature of contemporary discourse in the humanities, dubbing the type of language typical of professorial (or MLA) prose “Profsspeak.” Using Profsspeak, people who have nothing to say can cause what they say to “sound impressive, [permitting] the most commonplace observation [to appear] immeasurably profound, even if the subject is utterly insignificant.” In addition, Profsspeak makes it “much easier to avoid having to say anything directly,” and “it is easier than real thought or originality.”¹⁶³

Papers with titles like those listed by Roche, which Sykes would probably consider to be written in Profsspeak, fill the rosters at the academic conferences and crowd the academic journals. Most colleges and universities routinely reimburse faculty for the expenses of attending the conferences and many, as some critics charge, in effect provide a subsidy for the writing and publication of such papers by staffing the classrooms with adjunct faculty and teaching assistants so that the professors can pursue this type of research.

This arrangement is what led novelist Saul Bellow, in his novel *The Dean’s December*, to have his main character, Dean Corde, refer to academic salaries as a kind of welfare for idle intellectuals. Bellow might verge on rhetorical overkill (his protagonist runs into trouble for having opened his mouth), but probably does not cross that line when one considers how closely his fictional scenario parallels reality. The typical contemporary American university, especially with respect to its humanities departments, could be described as a kind of club where various erudite and narrowly special hobbies take place at taxpayer expense. These hobbies often have little or nothing to do with higher education as traditionally defined. They often have no relevance to the real needs of students. Too often they are antisocial and perverse, insulting the values that many students bring with them from their family and community environments.

Camille Paglia refers to “the conference crowd,” in particular, as “an international party circuit of literary luminaries” who are in many respects “amoral,” and whose relationships with one another are mediated “by cronyism, favoritism, patronage and collusion.”¹⁶⁴ As currently constituted, the public universities appear to serve the professors far more conveniently than they serve the students, at least on the humanities side of the curriculum.

Tenure, a highly valued concept in the academy, offers faculty an advantage not enjoyed by the members of any other profession: a practical lifetime guarantee against job loss. The long standing argument for tenure, that it protects academic freedom, carries some weight, but the domination of the existing liberal arts faculties by ideologues suggests that a real result of tenure is to prevent entry into the profession by those who do not espouse the reigning orthodoxy. Tenure in the existing system aids academic mischief and dereliction.

Faculty members who abhor “elitism” often describe themselves as representing the exclusive “cutting edge” of professionalism, and a “cutting edge” by definition can have room only for a few. So by definition, that cutting edge could be said to represent the elite. One solution to the problems of tenure may be to replace it with five-year renewable contracts that more nearly characterize the professional world outside of the academy. Having to face renewal on a regular basis would force any mischief makers and propagandists to devote more productive time and energy to the profession that taxpayers, students, and parents pay them to exercise: teaching young people to become intellectually competent.

VIII. Eleven Specific Policy Recommendations & Conclusion

These eleven policy recommendations would begin to improve the existing deficient undergraduate education system in a meaningful and healthy way:

1. *The teaching of English composition needs to be rescued from counterproductive and politicized theories imposed by self-proclaimed experts whose claims are not supported by empirical evidence; and steps must be taken to ensure that all students master mathematics and science at the college level.* The state universities of Michigan need to return to traditional methods because those methods generated the high levels of literacy and associated cognitive competencies which students no longer gain from their education. A rescue of this sort is badly needed in the case of English composition, and a number of models for successfully instilling higher literacy in first-year college students already exist. Public trials of these alternative methods on one or more of the state university campuses would enable administrators to decide whether or not contemporary fads and theories are superior to traditional pedagogy. The former theory prevails, and the consequence is a demonstrably low level of literacy among college graduates. Give each method a chance to prove its worth and the students a chance to benefit from whichever is better.

2. *The curriculum needs to be pared down drastically. The course catalogs of the state universities of Michigan contain hundreds of trendy, trivial, and politicized courses whose presence, in effect, dilutes the curriculum and degrades the educational experience for all students.* A carefully focused liberal arts curriculum is the traditional basis for specialization in the junior and senior years. The model for the neotraditional curriculum is found in the pre-World War I catalogs of Michigan State University. Administrators should examine the history of their institutions for ideas about how to make existing education better.

3. *Every campus of the state universities of Michigan needs a rigorous and accessible great books program.* One of the most proven ways to teach undergraduates the subtle skills and specific knowledge which they need to know in order to be genuinely educated is to put them through a great books program of some sort. Many models of the great books approach to liberal education exist and any one of them, implemented on any of the second-tier campuses on a trial basis, would demonstrate the powerful effect that careful guidance through classical texts can have on young people, both intellectually and ethically.

Administrators should examine the history of their institutions for ideas about how to make existing education better.

When making their inquiries, employers and alumni groups should look beyond public relations rhetoric and casual pronouncements by administrators, and insist on empirical evidence of solid educational achievement.

4. *The state universities of Michigan need to reduce the number of graduate programs: With the exception of one or two designated research campuses, graduate education needs to be radically de-emphasized.* Graduate programs inevitably draw disproportionate resources, reduce the amount of contact time between regular faculty and undergraduates, and put undertrained and undereducated teaching assistants into classrooms in place of the professors. The need for graduate humanities programs on the second tier campuses should be scrutinized especially carefully. New graduate programs at the second tier campuses, especially when these are doctoral programs, should be resisted by the governing boards of those institutions at least until competent undergraduate education is firmly reestablished.

5. *The state universities of Michigan need to offer aspiring teachers an entirely different type of education than what they are currently getting.* Teachers-in-training should take far fewer specialized courses in the education departments and schools of education and far more substantial courses in their majors. Putting in place a vital liberal core curriculum would raise the quality of teacher education enormously. Teachers should perhaps be certified by their major departments rather than by schools of education. Another idea is to permit and encourage consortia of properly credentialed individuals to offer certification programs outside the existing state-controlled system.

6. *Remedial courses like the newly instituted English 100 course at Central Michigan University should be eliminated.* As a recent *Los Angeles Times* editorial stated regarding a proliferation of similar courses in the California State University system, “a four-year college is not the appropriate place for remedial education.” Local K-12 boards of education, not the state universities, should be responsible for ensuring that students in K-12 schools learn basic skills.

7. *Alternative accreditation of English departments, writing programs, and other humanities departments and programs should be instituted.* As currently constituted, the accreditation of English departments and writing programs is monopolistic—controlled mainly by national organizations like NCATE, the accrediting arm of NCTE—and biased in favor of fads and theories that have impugned the efficacy of freshman composition and have led to the dissolution of the traditional core curriculum. The American Academy for Liberal Education, whose educational standards are very different from those of the regional accreditors, or other independent observers, should be invited to evaluate one or more existing program on at least one of the state university campuses.

8. *A public discussion about the benefits and problems of tenure should be instigated.* It is possible that the case for tenure can still be made, but it is worth noting that, in no other niche of the professional world, are employees practically guaranteed employment for life. The faculty organizations regularly claim that college teaching is a professional activity. This being the case, there should be no objection to the regularly renewable five- or even ten-year contracts that more nearly typify life in the rest of the professional world. The long-standing assumption that tenure is an unqualified success should be rigorously questioned.

9. *Employers and alumni groups should become critically involved in the oversight of the state universities of Michigan.* This is especially true of alumni groups who regularly contribute to their home campuses. Such groups need to ask hard questions about what their contributions support and if they decide that existing programs do not merit support then they should consider discontinuing their contributions. When making their inquiries, employers and alumni groups should look beyond public relations rhetoric and casual pronouncements by

administrators, and insist on empirical evidence of solid educational achievement. It is extremely important that employers, individuals, and groups make their concerns known to the respective governing boards of the universities, because these boards typically have the authority necessary to bring about real change in their institutions.

10. *The rules and regulations against political indoctrination in the classroom should be vigilantly observed and rigorously enforced.* Where they have lapsed, they should be revived. Of all the offenses perpetrated by state-salaried employees, the co-opting of classrooms by ideologues for the purpose of propagandizing students is perhaps the most damaging to all involved. In effect, tuition and tax dollars and student fees are diverted to support particular, sectarian causes. The same objection applies to the dormitories, where students are also likely to be subjected to propaganda and indoctrination.

11. *An all-campus undergraduate core curriculum, reflecting the principles stated in this report, should be established so that every student of the state universities of Michigan undergoes the same essential training and gains exposure to common, high-level material in the arts and sciences.* The governing boards of each of the fourteen Michigan public universities should direct the presidents of their institutions to confer on this matter and set in motion the administrative procedures that would bring about the relevant curricular result. It is extremely important that the design of such a core curriculum *not* be given exclusively to any particular contingent of existing faculty or professional organization—the MLA or the NCTE, for example—that is a source of the existing deficient curriculum. Independent reviewers who are willing and able to offer strong critique of the existing deficient curriculum need to be brought into the effort. A near-term deadline—two years or less—needs to be set for completing the project. Hopefully, the state universities will prove cooperative, making it totally unnecessary for the legislature or the governor to intervene, which would bring with it the risk of further politicization.

The state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts across the country, have incorporated trendy courses and programs and have become terribly deficient in the measurable intellectual formation of students. The comparison of the University of Michigan's 1914 *Catalogue of Courses* with its current *General Catalogue* makes the loss clear: Today's students are not challenged to learn during their undergraduate career even what they were already expected to know if they sought admission to the College of Letters and Sciences before World War I. Instead, under the rubric of choice, students pick up courses in scattershot fashion, with little guidance and little hope for consistency of result. Documents like *Recruiting Trends* and *Learning by Degrees* show that, broadly assessed, graduates of four-year colleges including those at the state universities of Michigan impress their employers as undereducated and achieve a disappointing level of literacy when this is measured by objective instruments.

Where it concerns Michigan's teachers, the higher education deficit has a redoubled effect. Poorly educated teachers make for poorly educated high school graduates, who in turn make for poorly prepared college freshmen. Faculty may then cite the unpreparedness of freshman as evidence that the undergraduate curriculum is too demanding and needs to be made less "hegemonic" or "oppressive" than it traditionally has been. Self-described postmodern and multiculturalist professors are able to manipulate the situation to impose their own (not the students') requirements on the curriculum. The spiral continues downward.

It is extremely important that employers, individuals, and groups make their concerns known to the respective governing boards of the universities.

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The models for genuine curricular reform to rescue American higher education are already present. The opportunity exists for Michigan to lead the way in a serious, concerted restructuring of higher education.

It is appropriate to conclude with a word about those for whom the state universities exist. They exist for the students. *But what do students need from the university?* The greatest need of students is to learn what it is that they need to know, and to learn what is possible for them to do and to become. They need to be immersed, with careful guidance, in the tradition that has given rise to Hayek's self-regulating "extended order," which is consistent with and inclusive of the free market. Immersion in the tradition provides students with the knowledge that they require firstly in order to understand themselves and secondly in order to understand the culture and the civilization in which they will live and work. Such immersion helps students make realistic existential decisions about the remainder of their lives. The transition to a gutted traditional liberal arts curriculum has led, in Sykes's words, "to clownish curriculums that have turned out college graduates unable to think critically or write a simple letter."¹⁶⁵ It has, in other words, risked sacrificing the students to the hobbies—frequently the political hobbies—of the professors, and all of this at the public expense. The state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts in other states, have for too long been unresponsive to the people they serve. The faculty has, in many cases, acted like an unsupervised agency, secure in its funding, with no obligation to serve those in whose name it exists. These imbalances must be redressed.

Reminding the faculty that they are public employees and restoring a traditional, liberal core curriculum to undergraduate education would help redress declining student performance. Restoring a traditional, liberal core curriculum would also be immensely beneficial to the K-12 public schools. Knowledge is the most valuable asset that teachers take with them into their classrooms. Today's teachers-in-training, overburdened by questionable "theoretical" courses in pedagogy, would especially benefit from the opportunity to become generally knowledgeable in a higher sense.

A good core curriculum mandatory for all students would help ensure that this was the case.

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Affirmative Action and Racial Preference at the University of Michigan

■ by Carl Cohen

Professor Carl Cohen, a long-time member of the Philosophy Department faculty at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, discusses the presence of racial preferences and biases in the admissions policy of his institution. Cohen makes the case that such policies are intrinsically immoral and have no place in any public institution. It should be remembered, in regard to Dr. Cohen's essay, that the notions of racial preference and group indemnity are intimately linked to the ideas of multiculturalism and diversity, which show up frequently in the existing undergraduate curriculum. In effect, Dr. Cohen shows what type of practice derives from the theory to which so many in the contemporary academy seem intent on recruiting students.

The public policy professed by the University of Michigan is one of strictly equal treatment of the races. In the disclaimer appearing in official University catalogs (and elsewhere) in the fall of 1995: "The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex, color, creed, national origin or ancestry . . . in employment, educational programs and activities, and admissions."

The formally approved practices of several Colleges within the University—as will be seen in detail below—do not accord with this professed commitment. In fact, preference by race is given systematically at the University of Michigan to applicants for admission—to the Law School, to the Medical School, and to the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the conclusion indisputable. The passages cited below, and figures given below, are all taken from official University documents obtained in response to Freedom of Information Act Requests which carefully avoided all individual identifications. Some documents requested were not provided, but the figures appearing on those that were provided are sufficient to demonstrate the case.

Preference for admission to the College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LS&A) for some racial groups is formally manifested in several ways.

1. Decisions Made on First Review of Applicants

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions prepares a many page document entitled "College of Literature, Science and the Arts / Guidelines for All Terms of 1996." The first page of this document gives admissions officers ("counselor") a table that directs their responses to applications on first review; some applicants are admitted at that time, some are rejected, and some decisions are postponed. Many decisions to admit or reject are specified as to be made automatically, by clerks. The table is headed "CONFIDENTIAL Internal Use Only."

All applicants are divided into 90 intellectual categories, or "cells," on the official table. Each cell is delineated by a combination of grade-point average in earlier schooling

Preference by race is given systematically at the University of Michigan.

(on the vertical axis) and ACT or SAT scores (on the horizontal axis). In each cell is written two or three lines of code, indicating responses to be made to applicants on first review. At the top of the table appears this instruction: "In general, use the top row in each cell for majority applicants and the middle and bottom rows for underrepresented minorities and other disadvantaged students."

There are many cells, many categories of performance, in which the directed response to majority applicants is rejection, but (with exactly the same scores) the directed response to minority applicants is acceptance. In ten cells, for example, in which GPA is 3.0 and above but SAT scores are below 1000, majority applicants are rejected; minority applicants accepted. In 24 cells in which GPA is below 2.7, majority applicants are rejected by clerks without further attention, while minority applicants, although not automatically admitted, are channeled for special processing. In nine mid-range cells in which GPAs are somewhat above 3 and SAT score are somewhat above 1090, minority applicants are accepted for admission while majority applicants are postponed for further review.

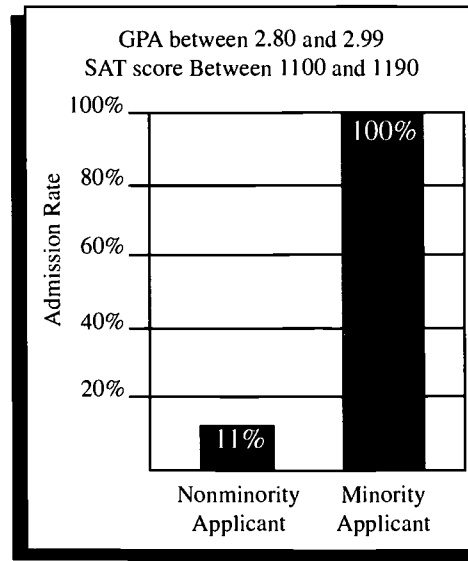
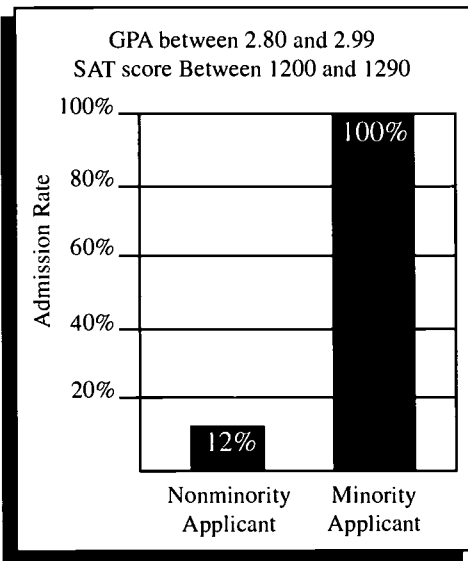
A careful review of the LS&A decision grid leaves no possible doubt that the system of first review response distinguishes sharply between minorities and nonminorities, giving substantial preference to the former. Whether the "Affirmative Action Objectives" of LS&A are quotas in fact is, as Justice Powell said in *Bakke*, a "semantic distinction [that] is beside the point. . . . It is a line drawn on the basis of race and ethnic status."

2. Admission Percentages to LS&A, by Ethnic Groups, Fall of 1994

In addition to preferential *policies*, such as those governing admission to LS&A, it is possible to exhibit marked preferential *results*.

A document headed "Office of Undergraduate Admissions" and subheaded "Profile of the University of Michigan, Fall 94, For All Units" gives a table, or grid, with 108

Admission to the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, Fall 1994



categories or “cells” delineated by “former school GPA” on the vertical axis and “best test score” [SAT or ACT] on the horizontal axis. In each cell appear the number in that category who *applied*, and the number in that category who were *offered admission*.

Grids of identical form are prepared for “underrepresented minorities,” and for all students. The fraction, admissions / applications, gives the *percentage* in that cell who were offered admission. Those percentages, for minorities and non minorities, may be readily compared. *These comparisons reveal strong systematic preference in favor of minorities in LS&A for 1994.* In almost every cell in which there were any minority applicants at all, the percentage of minority admissions was higher than the percentage of nonminority admissions. In many cells and groups of cells the minority admission rate was very much higher.

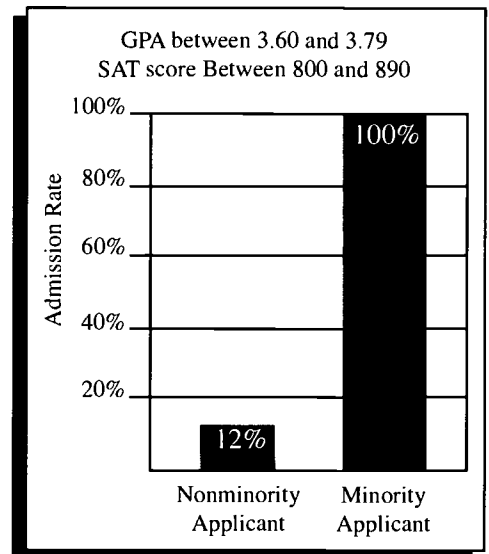
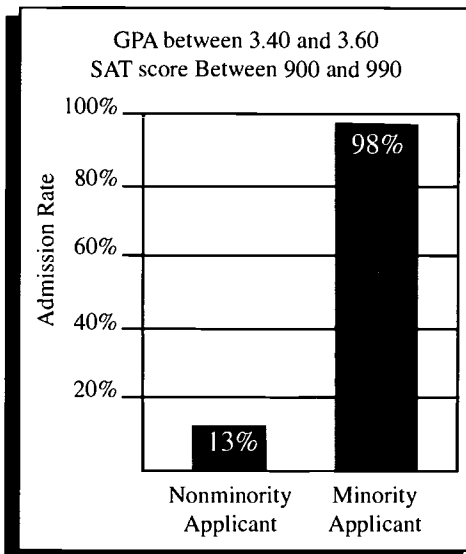
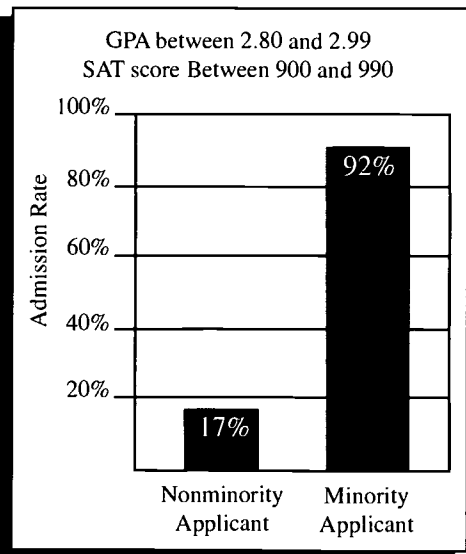
(a) If an applicant’s GPA was between 2.80 and 2.99 (B-), and SAT scores were 1200-1290, then the nonminority admission rate was 12% while the minority admission rate was 100%.

With the same GPA and SAT scores of 1100-1190, then the nonminority admission rate was 11% while the minority admission rate was 100%.

With the same GPA and SAT scores of 900-990, then the nonminority admission rate was 17% while the minority admission rate was 92%

(b) If an applicant’s GPA was between 3.40 and 3.60 (B+), and SAT scores were 900-990, then the nonminority admission rate was 13% while the minority admission rate was 98%.

(c) If an applicant’s GPA was between 3.60 and 3.79 (A-), and SAT scores were 800-890, then the nonminority admission rate was 12% while the minority admission rate was 100%.



Do the University officers who make the public declaration of commitment to equal treatment know or believe that in fact our practice does not accord with this profession?

And so on and on. There is no doubt that, flatly on the basis of minority group membership, strong preference is given in admission to the College of LS&A.

Similar programmatic biases can be shown in the selection of applicants to the Integrated Premedical-Medical Program (INTEFLEX), to the Law School of the University of Michigan, and to the Medical School of the University of Michigan.

Reasonable persons will agree that non-numerical factors—evidence other than a student's GPA or test scores—are appropriately considered in offering admission to applicants. Such factors as community service, character, special circumstances of earlier schooling, and the like will (rightly) account for many cases of numerically anomalous admission. But if weighed fairly, non-numerical factors will be considered for applicants of *every ethnic group*. In all groups there will be applicants with special needs, special talents, or special achievements. Good character and dedication to one's community are not found disproportionately among the members of any one race or ethnic group.

To give favor to males or females, to whites or blacks, or to persons of any color, *because* of their sex or color, is morally wrong because doing so is intrinsically *unfair*. Color, nationality, and sex are not attributes that entitle anyone to more (or less) of the good things in life, or to any special favor (or disfavor). When in the past whites or males did receive such preference, it was deeply wrong. The same type of preference is no less wrong now when the colors or sexes are changed. The very bitter fruit that racism has produced is a consequence of its immorality.

Admission practices at the University of Michigan indeed show very marked preferences by race and ethnic category. This is not consistent with the University's formal profession of strict equality of treatment by race, cited above.

The question arises—Do the University officers who make the public declaration of commitment to equal treatment know or believe that in fact our practice does not accord with this profession? If they do, troubling issues of honesty arise. If they do not, if they have been truly unaware of the racial preferences we give in admission, then changes certainly ought to be made very promptly now. Either we must change our practices to bring them into accord with the public declaration of our university, or we must change our public declaration so that it reports honestly the racial preferences that we give.

Mathematics in the Postmodernist Era

■ Arthur T. White

Professor Arthur T. White, a teacher of mathematics at Western Michigan University, discusses ongoing developments in mathematics education. Mathematics, like English and other disciplines in the humanities, has begun to feel the influence of postmodern pedagogies of the same type that have led, for example, to the declining standards of freshman composition.

I was attracted to mathematics over forty years ago, and have remained devoted to the discipline since, because of its qualities of truth, beauty, objectivity, and aloofness from matters mundane. Bertrand Russell said it better in *The Study of Mathematics* (1910):

Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty—a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of stern perfection, such as only the greatest art can show. . . . The generations [of mathematicians] have gradually created an ordered cosmos, where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and where one, at least, of our nobler impulses can escape from dreary exile in the natural world.¹⁶⁶

But the academic movement known as postmodernism, which is present now in all disciplines, takes a different view. As Gertrude Himmelfarb alerts us in her essay on “Academic Advocates” in *Commentary*:

The animating spirit of postmodernism is a radical skepticism and relativism that rejects any idea of truth, knowledge, reason, or objectivity. More important, it refuses even to aspire to such ideas, on the ground that they are not only unattainable but undesirable—that they are, by their very nature, authoritarian and oppressive¹⁶⁷

Postmodernism—with its origin in the writings of Derrida and Foucault, for example—took hold, in this country, in our departments of English and comparative literature. Traditional literary criticism, in which the text is primary and the reader is secondary, has been “deconstructed” and replaced by an array of approaches currently featuring “reader response” theory, where the reader is primary and the text is secondary. This inversion has the effect of increasing the self-esteem of the reader, while diminishing the legacy of the great thinkers and crafters of language of the past. The deconstruction of history has led to the National History Standards (vehemently rejected, in their first incarnation, by the United States Senate), to the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian Institute (similarly rejected), and to Afro-centrist history (currently being hotly debated). In each case, established fact is subordinated to the need for self-esteem, or for addressing grievances of various groups claiming victim status, or for replacing Western culture and tradition with multiculturalism.

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The deconstruction of science has produced a distrust in the scientific method and in technology, and has heightened interest in alternative medicine, creationism, astrology, and the paranormal.¹⁶⁸ The further deconstruction of patterns of Western thought has led to “emotion based reasoning,” which produces such phenomena as the advocacy of jury nullification in contexts of social engineering. With Russell, I had thought mathematics and mathematicians to be secure from all such social and political inroads. But are we? There is evidence that we are not.

A mathematician, I believe, is quite likely to be motivated by the Platonic view that mathematics is external to the human mind, that mathematical truth is discovered and—within a given system of axiomatic assumptions—that it has the desirable quality of being absolute. This traditional view is today being deconstructed by some mathematicians and by many mathematic educators.¹⁶⁹ The notion of mathematics as objective and eternal is today being replaced, among mathematics educators, by the postmodernist notion of “social constructivism.” According to “social constructivism,” knowledge is subjective, not objective; rather than being found by careful investigation of an actually existing external world, it is “constructed” (i.e., created) by each individual, according to his unique needs and social setting. Absolutism is deliberately replaced by cultural relativism, as if $2 + 2 = 5$ were correct as long as one’s personal situation or perspective required it to be correct.

The philosophical stance one takes on these issues would seem to have substantial impact on one’s pedagogy. The new pedagogy in mathematics, as represented by the “Curriculum Standards for School Mathematics” and the “Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics” of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and as embodied in the calculus reform movement, has much that even a mathematical Platonist like myself can find of value. For example, I have enjoyed using small-group guided discovery in my classes where appropriate, and for many years I have been stressing mathematic reasoning (as opposed to rote calculation), problem solving, connections, and writing experiences in the mathematical classroom. I also use a modified Moore method of instruction and a tutorial system in my “Mathematical Proofs” course. I am not, therefore, locked into a traditional lecture-style pedagogy exclusively.

But the aspects of the Standards and of calculus reform that trouble me are those that just might be more motivated by postmodernist egalitarian—perhaps even neo-Marxist—political, rather than pedagogical, considerations. And so I raise the following concerns.

(1) Mathematics education, through both the NCTM Standards and calculus reform, has the goal of making mathematics accessible to all students. But I wonder, after we pare away whatever of mathematics is not accessible to everyone, whether what remains will still be mathematics. If, in fact, we hope in vain that the masses can master mathematics, then perhaps calculus (or algebra) does have a legitimate role as a filter for some students, as well as being a pump for some others. If we make calculus (or algebra) easy enough for everybody, we might well find that we have so dumbed it down that we have dumbed it away.

(2) Reform trends indicate that group work (cooperative and/or collaborative learning) should be almost universally appropriate in the classroom. Students teaching each other material they don’t know, and perhaps have no affinity for, might be effective in a relativistic sense, but if we don’t want to

discard millennia of the best that careful thought has produced, then I doubt that the pedagogy is universally effective in any rigorously objective sense. To whatever extent we assess by groups, then I fear that we are following the failed Marxist maxim: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

(3) One calculus reform text openly states its goal of replacing elegance, one of the traditional criteria of mathematical thinking, with brute force. This, perhaps, would make the material both less mathematically pleasing to some students, and more accessible to others, thus more nearly approximating the egalitarian equality of outcome. But this nation has long stood for equality of opportunity, not necessarily of outcome.

(4) The increased emphasis on technology and on practical applications, as with many other aspects of the reformed pedagogy, should be of benefit to true *users* of mathematics. But we should also concern ourselves with the future *producers* of mathematics. When much of the proposed pedagogy is driven by educators who are not themselves mathematicians, or who perhaps are seeking to politicize mathematics, then the inadequacy of the training for the next generation of *mathematicians* becomes suspect. I believe that realistic, but conceptually and numerically cumbersome, applications are better left to their specialty disciplines, as they hinder and even obscure the mathematical tools being developed in mathematics courses.

(5) The increasing emphasis on inductive reasoning, with the concomitant de-emphasis of deductive reasoning, might not be the best way to prepare careful thinkers. Instead, I detect here the specter of the postmodernist rejection of rational thought. The "definition-theorem-proof" format that has survived scrutiny since Euclid, and stands as the model of mankind's intellectual potential and achievement, is now under such an attack that, without resistance from its supporters, it might soon vanish entirely from the high school and calculus curricula. "Writing to learn" and classroom discourse can be effective pedagogically, but if carried to excess, they threaten to distract from precision of thought. To what extent do the "rule of three" (numerical, graphic, and symbolic approaches) and redefining mathematics as a laboratory discipline make pedagogical sense? To what extent do they inject sociopolitics into our discipline?

(6) Reformers would have us avoid problems having just one correct solution. Surely this is postmodernist relativism asserting itself again.

(7) Granted, nationwide the results of calculus instruction are distressing. Some think that this should *force* a reform of the pedagogy. Others might prefer to reform the attitudes and abilities of students who take calculus. Perhaps the lecture system really is the worst system of instruction there is . . . except, of course, for all the others.

(8) To the multiculturalists, to the postmodern cultural relativists, to the selectors of the amazingly politically correct photographs for the NCTM's

I fear that we are following the failed Marxist maxim: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics,” we should simply say—
“We welcome all who wish to join us in our glorious adventure; we will support and encourage you. But there is just one culture here: It is mathematics.”

Undergraduate Engineering at the University of Michigan 1956-1996

■ John A. Clark, Sc.D.

Dr. John A. Clark is Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he has served since 1957, including two terms as Department Chairman. He holds the BSE (ME) from the University of Michigan (1948) and both the SM and SCD from M.I.T. (1949 and 1953), where he also served on faculty from 1949 to 1957. Dr. Clark's essay on the evolution of the academic calendar at the University of Michigan suggests how seemingly unimportant administrative changes can have unforeseen and deleterious effects on education.

In the study which this essay accompanies, Dr. Bertonneau evaluates the present condition of undergraduate education in the state universities of Michigan. His evaluation focuses on the core curriculum in the liberal arts at these institutions and finds much that needs correction. The problems found in Michigan's publicly supported universities mirror those reported for the nation in the recent study *The Dissolution of Higher Education: 1914-1993* released earlier this year by the National Association of Scholars (NAS). Both Dr. Bertonneau's study and that of the NAS call for more citizen involvement in the processes of higher education. Certainly the stakes in the outcome from institutions of higher education in Michigan are great for each citizen and for many reasons, mostly, but not exclusively, pedagogical. Dr. Bertonneau points out the interesting, important, and probably little-known fact that in 1997 the annual taxpayer subsidy projected for each student is \$4,150. This is surely reason enough for the citizens of the state to have concerns about the management of education in its state universities.

At the conclusion of his exhaustive study, Dr. Bertonneau makes eleven specific policy recommendations for educational reform in Michigan. While all these recommendations directly address the problems he has identified, two seem to me to be of particular significance and are likely to generate considerable debate. These are to reduce the number of graduate programs and to inaugurate real debate about the desirability of academic tenure. Both of these recommendations are valuable and should be discussed vigorously in the public arena. In my opinion, if implemented, these two recommendations especially would benefit academic programs, faculty, and students—and the citizens of Michigan, who have as much at stake in the genuine effectiveness of the state universities as those who teach at or are currently enrolled in them.

My own career of over a half century has been in Engineering Education at M.I.T. and the University of Michigan. This—engineering specifically and the applied sciences generally—is an aspect of higher education that Dr. Bertonneau has not directly addressed, so it is appropriate for me to offer some commentary based on my own experience of five decades.

Because of the quantitative nature of an engineering curriculum it is much less influenced by subjective forces such as those now affecting the teaching of languages, literature, history, and other fields in the liberal arts. Hence the objective quality of engineering tends

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to insulate its academic programs against the distorting effect of current enthusiasms that are essentially political in nature. This is not to say, however, that a political element is entirely absent from the programs supported by engineering colleges since most are heavily involved with research activities largely supported by the federal government. Certainly such support does influence the attitudes of engineering faculty regarding their professional relationship with the governmental agencies that fund their projects. Such sponsorship has the inevitable effect of creating dependency on the federal bureaucracy and it correspondingly affects the receiving institution's management of its own affairs. This in turn leads to a loss of what might be called institutional identity, and it depresses the purely scientific impulse to follow a research interest in whatever direction it leads. These threats to institutional autonomy are probably a more important subject of national debate than is usually supposed. People are always discussing whether federal support should be increased or decreased, but only very rarely do they get around to the primary question of whether federal support is a good or a bad thing overall. However, federal support of academic research is complex and, while important, deserves a more extended forum than I am able to exercise here.

The academic curriculum in engineering has not been subjected to the type of "deconstruction" and revision that has afflicted the liberal arts. At the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, with which I am familiar, the courses of study are presented with a high degree of fidelity to objective truths. The faculty are generally very capable, dedicated, and scholarly. Research activity can, and sometimes does, divert a faculty member's attention from a basic teaching function, although it is important to note that research is often closely linked with teaching, so that the two cannot be absolutely separated, particularly at the level of graduate education. But something has happened over a period of about thirty years which has degraded the "learning opportunity potential" (as I like to call it) even of engineering students, and this development is not unconnected with other developments described by Dr. Bertonneau.

I refer to the gradual reduction in the length of the academic year and in the total academic semester-hours required to earn a bachelor's degree in engineering. These reductions at Michigan occurred almost simultaneously in engineering during the early 1960s. At that time, largely as a result of political pressure from the state legislature to use university facilities more "efficiently," the university changed its academic year from the traditional semester system to what is called a trimester system. This resulted in a reduction in the number of classroom days in an academic year from 206 in 1960-61 to 189 thereafter, a calendar still in effect today. At about the same time, the College of Engineering reduced the number of semester credit hours required for the bachelor's degree from an average of 138 to 128. This double reduction resulted in an approximate 15% loss in true course contact / classroom contact for students, or what I call the "learning opportunity potential."

While well stated reasons were given for this combined trimming of the academic calendar and reduction in degree requirements, the fact is that both were reduced. I recognize that there is no absolute basis for evaluating curricular structures, but I am also strongly of the opinion that the pre-1960-61 curriculum served engineering education better than the post-1960-61 curriculum. A 15% reduction in the student's "learning opportunity potential" is significant.

Certain other, less tangible, losses accompanied the shrinkage of the calendar year and the reduction in degree-requirements. In 1996, classes were over on April 23, which was the last practical date for any student-faculty socializing. Prior to the trimester system, it was

traditional for the faculty and undergraduates in mechanical engineering to hold a June picnic together, an event greatly anticipated by all, especially by graduating seniors. Ann Arbor is especially beautiful in May and June, as spring returns to campus. Now, however, most students have left campus by the first few days of May, and they are unable to enjoy either the faculty-student picnic or the delights of spring on campus.

This might seem unimportant, but I believe that such experiences should not be underestimated. They represented an important aesthetic or even spiritual perquisite to the hard side of education and their loss is therefore to be deplored. I suggest that alumni relations, for example, have probably lost something in their intensity of commitment because of the disappearance of opportunities for faculty and students to interact informally and socially. The question of the academic calendar is not, then, a purely technical or administrative one. Like almost every aspect of higher education, there are subtle factors that a purely material view of the situation fails to take into account.

A good first step in the reform of undergraduate education at the University of Michigan, and perhaps on other campuses where the same type of calendar is in force, would be to restore the traditional semester system. I understand that, after nearly four decades of living with the tri-mester system, this would present difficulties, not the least of which would be fiscal. But most reforms of institutions are difficult and the value of any reform must be weighed against the vicissitudes of implementation. Thus, while there is probably only slim hope for restoring the bachelor's degree requirement in engineering to a more rigorous 138 semester hours, such a change would nevertheless be beneficial for students, and it ought to at least be the subject of serious, rather than perfunctory, discussion.

A concept familiar to engineers—and to anyone who has taken a basic physics course—is the concept of *inertia*, which can be defined as the tendency of an object to remain in motion or at rest. Metaphorically speaking, *institutions* appear to be subject to inertia: Decisions are made, without sufficient foresight, which set institutions on a course which they dumbly maintain. Sometimes we refer to the “status quo” as something unchangeable or even inviolable. But institutions are created by people and they are subject both to critique and to alteration. I strongly believe that the time has come to reject what I might call the “myth of institutional inertia” that protects higher education from serious scrutiny. It is time to take a long hard look at the cumulus of thirty years or more of institutional inertia and to make changes.

What I Learned at the School of Education

■ by Andrew Titus

Andrew Titus recently received his accreditation from Central Michigan University's School of Education. With a high grade point average coming out of his undergraduate work, a year of foreign study, and a knowledge of Russian, he is the type of student whom, one would think, professors of education would want to send into the public schools. But Titus found that the curriculum for aspiring teachers was more concerned with correct attitudes than with genuine knowledge.

A few years ago, acting on a long-standing desire, I decided to become a teacher. I already knew a great deal about the state of public education, and felt some discouragement, but I had recently attended a seminar on charter schools put on by the Governor's Office. Here was a context, I thought, where my ambition made sense, and within a month I had signed up for Central Michigan University's "Introduction to Teaching," a course offered by the teacher training program. "Introduction to Teaching" is, in fact, the foundation of CMU's education curriculum.

When I took the course, it was taught by two professors, one of whom conducted a morning session of standard lectures, while the other conducted a "video tape laboratory" in the evening. I was astonished at how propagandistic this course was.

A substantial portion of class time—probably the greater portion—was spent, not on inculcating pedagogical skills, or in discussing the ethics of teaching, but in converting the students to a certain way of thinking.

A major thrust in "Introduction to Teaching" was to give students what I would describe as a "Peace Corps" attitude toward the public schools and, in particular, to get them to adopt a missionary state of mind toward public "inner city" schools. While critical of modern public schools generally, I nevertheless hold no specific brief against "inner city" schools; I merely thought it odd that, in a course described as concerning education generally, the emphasis was on the sociological conditions of America's worst schools. Session after session was devoted to testimony by visiting teachers about the public schools and their special sectors. By contrast, there were no visits from private school, parochial school, charter school, or country school teachers. Those types of schools were evidently of no interest to the two professors who were running the course.

One evening, we watched a film—for nearly an hour—about how middle school children differ greatly from elementary and high school pupils. At its conclusion, the film urged students to sign up for middle school certification. Even though nothing in the film was objectionable by itself, disguising a plea, which might well be legitimate, for more middle school teachers as a lesson in cognitive psychology seemed to me to be needlessly tricky. Why not just say to the class: "There's a need for more middle school teachers, here's what's special about middle school, and are there any takers?" But the incident

typifies the education curriculum as I experienced it. Far too much of it is a come-on of one sort or another and far too little concerns knowledge.

Near the end of the course, we were given the assignment of making a collage about “our feelings on an aspect of education.” We were not, I add, asked to express our reasons for wanting to be teachers in a closely reasoned essay, or asked to define the role of the teacher in rigorous terms. We were asked to make a *collage*—in effect, a poster—about our *feelings*.

The low intellectual level of the assignment aside, responses to it showed the powerful effect that a semester of indoctrination had on students, most of whom are in their early twenties. (I am thirty years old, having resumed my education after a lapse of a few years.) Nearly all students conformed to the ideas espoused during the course, possibly because they had been exposed to no competing ideas, possibly because they sensed that conformity was the correct procedure. Grades of “A” and “A-” were awarded liberally.

I had chosen “discipline” as the aspect of education about which I would express my “feelings.” The centerpiece of my collage was a photograph that I had taken from an opera magazine showing an angry king scolding a lackey. It read: “It is the tone of voice that one remembers.”

Of course, like mathematics professor Alan Sokal when he submitted his nonsense article to *Social Text*, I was mocking the institutional assumptions. What I did was completely opposite to what was expected. Yet I, too, received an “A.” How could this be? It happens that the teachers of “Introduction to Teaching,” when I took it, were adherents of a doctrine that is known as process teaching. In this method it is not *what* a student produces that matters but only that something *is produced*. In completing the assignment—which I still regard as useless—I had “gone through a process,” and it was automatically assumed that I had learned something. The quality of my work was irrelevant.

The student who successfully completes “Introduction to Teaching” may enter the education department and follow the rest of the program.

The department has made matriculation very long and complicated. They have published, for several years, a 135-page book explaining their policies and the many stages of their program from “pre-entry” through student teaching. By comparison, Hillsdale College, whose program I investigated, explains their education curriculum in less than a page of their general catalog. Besides state mandated tests, CMU requires many of its own tests. You could say, “Oh, CMU imposes a stricter regimen than the state at large,” but the additional examinations aren’t additionally difficult, they’re merely additional.

There is one exception of a peculiar sort, the “Teacher Perceiver Test.” This is a formal, orally administered personality assessment of about 65 questions. A passing grade is fifty percent. But the criteria of judgment is not in any way objective. Rather, answers are classified as right or wrong according to their conformity to a statistical average of what “good” teachers have said in response to the same questions.

The first-time failure rate on this hurdle is high. But a passing grade is a requirement for entry to the program and the test may only be taken twice. A second failure locks a student out of the program permanently, a policy unique in the university. Again, you could

The additional examinations aren’t additionally difficult, they’re merely additional.

say, "Oh, the educators are very careful about whom they admit to the program." Well, yes, but their criterion is, quite literally, conformity to the existing orthodoxy. Dissenters hardly need apply.

Now it is possible even for a person of critical disposition to pass the test: He can memorize the "right" answers and deliver them the second time around, but it is an exercise in doctrinaire concession, not a measure of intelligence or ability, in my opinion.

The "right" answer for some questions is obvious. When asked, for example, "Are you organized," one says, "Yes, I'm organized." Follow-up questions probe sincerity, but, once again, in an obvious way, easy to detect. Other questions are more subtle. Some require a highly developed knowledge of "correct" classroom procedure or agreement with certain ideas in contemporary pedagogy.

In preparing this essay, I asked about fifteen of my fellow students whether they thought the personality test was a fair test of their ability as teachers. Several were taken aback by the question, wondering why I even bothered to pose it. When one student said that she simply "went through the motions," she expressed a common sentiment that the test is a sham. One student said bluntly, "You just have to lie."

Students do this because they must and because honest disagreement will get them nowhere.

Of course, the department justifies its matriculation requirements by claiming that it weeds out inappropriate students. I cannot speak to that, but I know of several students who have left CMU to earn their teacher certification elsewhere because they were revolted by the department's admissions process.

In closing, I would like to offer some entirely unsolicited advice to CMU's teacher-educators: Scrap the personality test and raise the grade point average required for admission; stop imposing contentless education courses on students paying a stiff tuition-fee and let them take meat-and-potatoes courses in their fields of specialization. If they did these things, the quality of Michigan's teachers—the ones who come from CMU—would be greatly improved.

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Memory and Expectation: Language and Literature at Hillsdale College

■ John S. Reist

John S. Reist is Professor of Christianity and Literature at Hillsdale College in Michigan. Hillsdale, which is mentioned several times in the foregoing report, has distinguished itself by consistently refusing to yield to the postmodern wave. Professor Reist explains, in his essay, how the teaching of language and literature at Hillsdale College differs from the teaching of language and literature in the postmodern university.

A liberal arts education can be resolved, philosophically and pedagogically, into two fundamental elements, *memory* and *expectation*.

By *memory*, I mean the recall, address, presentation and appropriation of our Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian *tradition* which has properly endured as the continuing basis of higher education. It is Western Civilization's *tradition*—in mathematics, art, music, natural sciences, language, religion, and philosophy—which we transmit in the present and so bequeath to the future, which characterizes liberal education.

By *expectation*, I mean the positive and productive attitude toward the future—a future which not only *comes* to us, but which we *approach* and *create* through the critical habit of mind, through the values that we inherit, and through the professional orientation, career guidance, and technological training which a modern college provides for students. As an example of the future that *comes* to us, I would mention the multicultural world which challenges us; as an example of the future that we *create*, I would mention those programs that we adopt to inform and enable students to learn of various ethnic groups—their values, history, productivity, needs, and potential.

It is our *tradition* that provides the energizing source and firm foundation which in turn produce a *trajectory* that impels and compels liberally educated men and women into the future—a future of material prosperity for all, ecological responsibility from all, moral accountability in all, and social compassion for all.

Memory and *expectation*—as Søren Kierkegaard said, life must be lived forward but is understood backward. A proper look backward to our cultural inheritance prevents it from becoming burdensome baggage; instead the *tradition* provides a trajectory that moves us and challenges us to “live forward” toward moral achievement, career attainment, religious wisdom, and social sensibility.

Such a tradition contains within itself the sensibility and tools of self analysis and critique; thus, the canon is not closed but is shaped by cultural understanding and awareness that makes possible the inclusion of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Herman Melville (who had been ignored until the 1920s) and the acceptance of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, new lights whose critique of the tradition is made possible by the tradition itself, while such momentary and lesser lights as Edward Young and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are eventually dropped.

A liberal arts education can be resolved into two fundamental elements, memory and expectation.

We teach literature as a specific literary effort and achievement of the author.

At Hillsdale College we focus initially, but not only initially, on the text, for we believe that

- Gender is no substitute for Genre;
- Politicization is no substitute for plot;
- Social engineering is no substitute for setting;
- Diversity is no substitute for drama;
- Rap is no substitute for rhetoric;
- Awareness of self is no substitute for skill in aesthetics.

The categories on the left in the sentences immediately above are important, legitimate, and unavoidable; but they ought not to be taught *instead* of literature, nor should literature be used to teach them propagandistically, ideologically, or surreptitiously. We teach literature as a specific literary effort and achievement of the author; and then all the rest will come 'round—either through the literature so taught or from other disciplines and institutions such as the family, the church, the YMCA, the YWCA, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, the counseling services, and other like organization which do what the study of literature should never be employed to do: build a global society, increase student self-esteem, boost a student's social identity, or simply provide an occasion for friendly and casual mixing. Still less should literature be hijacked to promote relativism under the mask of tolerance or divert students' attention from Western literature and culture by cluttering the curriculum with "other cultures" to such a degree that few students know when the Civil War was fought or why—let alone what an epic, a lyric, an anapest, or a novel is. A traditionalist in these matters necessarily believes that

- Literature is not merely shared—it is taught and learned;
- Journaling is not learning—it is merely untrammelled self-expression;
- Politics is not poetry;
- Theology is not theater;
- Morality is not mimesis.

The traditionalist believes that the student, critic, or reader is the servant, not the creator of the text. The traditionalist understands (and reminds his or her students) that every one comes to the text with a pre-understanding, or self-understanding, or convictions, or whatever else is bound up in the reader's personal history. Nonetheless, the traditionalist teaches that there *is* a text to be addressed and which addresses the student and it is this text

that is accepted and taught and evaluated, not merely shaped or distorted or created and thus abused by the student. The traditionalist believes that deconstructionists are living on borrowed capital and we want to know what it is that they are referring to when they say there is no text *there*.

Therefore, we teach that literature should be understood in the following three ways:

A. Intrinsicly—What is the object before me? Can I describe it? What are its parts and how are they arranged and toward what end? What, if anything, does such a composition of parts (the aesthetic whole) achieve?

B. Referentially—From what era of history does the text come? From what geographical context? From what social, economic, political, or religious background? Is this text only a mirror which reflects the culture uncritically, or is it also a lamp that enlightens the culture from which it comes, which uncritically reveals the dark as well as the bright places? Does it do the same for current culture? For me? Is this text mere imaginative fiction with no reference at all to its external world, or is it a tissue of intertextuality, or does it refer to the world of beef and ale that we all otherwise know?

C. Ultimate—Only after the student addresses A and B is he prepared to appropriate the work personally. What *ultimately*, or personally, do I do or how should I change in thinking or in action?

The latter “ultimate” category leads to the second part of our English program at Hillsdale—writing, since writing is the way by which the student develops his own understanding of the world.

Writing is required, at Hillsdale, in English 101-102, Freshman Rhetoric and The Great Books, which are mandatory for all students. These courses combine a study of the master works of Western civilization with a writing component of five essays equal in worth in grading; the essays address the Great Books. These essays make the student familiar with such rhetorical modes as comparison and contrast, induction and deduction, narrative, process analysis, and description. Students must master these techniques as well as acquire a conscious understanding of English grammar and syntax, for we believe that fundamental grammar and syntax are not merely relative to slang or dialect, but express and define the culture in which such discourse is required. Students must document and debate in these papers, so that their personal opinions might be elevated to the level of knowledge and conviction. Many of our professors permit students to revise papers. When students finish 101 and 102, we intend that they be able to state a thesis carefully, organize their argument in coherent paragraphs of progressing order, document accurately and completely, and begin to develop a personal style.

In the English major and the American Studies major, students write appropriate papers and examinations at higher levels of discourse, and the major is completed with a thesis of not less than twenty pages, written during the senior English seminar, that addresses an important theme or aspect of literature; for example, Literature and Theodicy, or Literature and Landscape. The student must demonstrate his mastery of grammar, his ability in

rhetoric, his skill in research, and his capacity to argue deductively and inductively. Professors give significant amounts of time and personal attention to each student's development—whether at the 100 course level or the 500 course level.

Our purpose is not to impose gender preference, or political orientation, or religious convictions, or atheism, or economic requirements; rather, we wish to develop students who personally understand human existence through a study of narrative, drama, epic, essay, lyric and other literary techniques employed by the great writers of our tradition who have shaped us. We also wish to graduate students who can spell, recite, read, write, and debate. Through such *memory* of the great tradition and by teaching students critical thinking and written discourse, we hope to provide society with students from whom we all can *expect* great things.

Endnotes

¹ Tuition in the state universities of Michigan might well be inflated, but the fact remains that, inflated or not, tuition fees pay for about half of a student's education. The remainder is provided by the taxpayers. In the Executive Budget for fiscal year 1997 this stands at \$4,150 per student. Public higher education in Michigan is subsidized higher education, and this subsidy permits the citizens of Michigan, through their representatives, to make demands on the system.

² Aaron Steelman and Joseph P. Overton. *Advancing Civil Society: A State Budget to Strengthen Michigan Culture* (Second Edition). Midland, Michigan: Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 1996. (44)

³ Interview with Michigan Department of Management and Budget spokesperson Maureen McNulty. Lansing, February 6, 1996.

⁴ The actual figures are \$145,757,642 for the University of Michigan and \$50,156,914 for Michigan State University. These figures were confirmed by telephone calls to the universities' development offices on October 18, 1996.

⁵ *The Dissolution of Higher Education*. Princeton, New Jersey: The National Association of Scholars, 1996. (62)

⁶ *SUNY's Core Curricula: The Failure to Set Consistent and High Academic Standards*. Empire Foundation for Policy Research. Clifton Park, New York. July 1996.

⁷ *The Dissolution of General Education*.

⁸ *The Dissolution of General Education*. (3)

⁹ These documents are not a small sample of the total available. They represent either a majority of courses discussed in the report of a significant and representative sample thereof.

¹⁰ A study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching found that U. S. college and university academic professionals ranked second highest in the world, surpassed only by Korea, in the percent who perceive there to be political or ideological restrictions on what a scholar may publish. See *International Survey of the Academic Profession, 1991-1993*, table 57.

¹¹ Patrick L. Scheetz, Ph.D. *Recruiting Trends 1994-95: A Study of Businesses, Industries, and Governmental Agencies Employing New College Graduates*. Lansing: Michigan State University (Collegiate Employment Research Institute), 1995.

¹² Among 545 employers responding to Recruiting Trends are AT & T, Chrysler Corporation, Coca Cola, Coors Brewing, Delta Dental Plan, Dow Corning, Ford Motor Company, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, IBM, the Lockheed Corporation, Michigan Biotechnology Institute, Michigan Consolidated Gas, Michigan National Bank, Motorola Semiconductors, Nabisco, Quaker Oats, Sandia National Laboratories, Teledyne, Thiokol, Vought Aircraft, Westin Hotels and Resorts, and Zenith Electronics Corporation.

¹³ Scheetz. (13)

¹⁴ Scheetz. (3)

¹⁵ Scheetz. (16)

¹⁶ Scheetz. (16)

¹⁷ Scheetz. (26)

¹⁸ Scheetz. (2)

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- ¹⁹ William J. Bennett. *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. (85)
- ²⁰ Paul E. Barton and Archie LaPointe. *Learning by Degrees: Indicators of Performance in Higher Education*. Princeton, New Jersey: Policy Information Center (Education Testing Service), 1994.
- ²¹ Barton and LaPointe. (2)
- ²² Barton and LaPointe. (6)
- ²³ Scheetz. (16)
- ²⁴ Scheetz. (2)
- ²⁵ Barton and LaPointe. (3)
- ²⁶ Barton and LaPointe. (32)
- ²⁷ Barton and LaPointe. (6)
- ²⁸ Scheetz. (24)
- ²⁹ *The Dissolution of General Education*. (19 & 47)
- ³⁰ Among the verbal problems afflicting the prose of upper-division students in a Central Michigan University English course which I recently taught were the following: The verb "to betray" was used in place of the verb "to portray" in a discussion of the movie *The Maltese Falcon*; the misspelled and dictionally erroneous "wood of" was used in place of the correct "would have" in an attempt at a conditional sentence ("He wood of gone if he had the money"); the plural pronoun "they" was used as the subsequent of a singular noun (this is pandemic among freshmen); there was confusion about the appropriateness of "there," "their," and "they're" and similar confusion about the appropriateness of "then" and "than"; and there was a proliferation of sentence fragments (this, too, is pandemic among freshmen). I emphasize that these were juniors and seniors who had already taken the so-called basic courses and had received passing grades. See my article "Epistemological Correctness in English 101" forthcoming in *Academic Questions*, February 1997.
- ³¹ Scheetz. (26)
- ³² *Catalogue of the University of Michigan 1914-1915*. (102)
- ³³ Heather Mac Donald. "Why Johnny Can't Think." *The Public Interest*. Number 120, Summer 1995. (3-13)
- ³⁴ Steve Kogan. "'Discourse Production': Composition Studies in the Grip of Literary Theory." *Academic Questions*. Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring 1994. (55-71)
- ³⁵ 4C's Statement. Published by the Conference for College Compositions and Communication. (3) This document and others in the same vein are required reading in the teaching practicums where graduate assistant writing instructors are prepared for the classroom. The copy cited here, for example, comes from a "course pack" (a collection of photocopied articles) used to train teaching assistants in the Department of English Language and Literature at Central Michigan University. The "course pack" is undated. It was acquired by the author in January, 1995.
- ³⁶ In fact, as Professor Arthur White notes in his accompanying essay, an emergent "postmodern" approach to mathematics education actually does de-emphasize correct answers and the details of procedure.
- ³⁷ Christy Rishoi Minadeo and Larry Juchartz. "The Rhetoric of Enfleshment: Teachers as Constructed Selves Engaged in the Discourse of Others." *Michigan Academician: Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts & Letters*. Vol. 27, No. 3, May 1995. (362)
- ³⁸ Mac Donald. (3-4)
- ³⁹ *Standards for the English Language Arts (For the Profession, by the Profession: A Guide for Discussion)*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996. (25)

- ⁴⁰ *College Composition and Communication*. Vol. 23, No. 3, October 1972. (325)
- ⁴¹ Executive Statement of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. In *College Composition and Communication*. Vol. 23, No. 3, October 1972. (325)
- ⁴² Collection of state university freshman composition syllabi acquired by the author in 1994.
- ⁴³ *College Composition and Communication*. Vol. 23, No. 3, October 1972. (323)
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in *Academic Questions*. Vol. 8, No. 2. Spring 1995. (48)
- ⁴⁵ Kogan. (61)
- ⁴⁶ Kogan. (60)
- ⁴⁷ Kogan. (61)
- ⁴⁸ Kogan. (56)
- ⁴⁹ Standards for the English Language Arts. (20, 41, 37)
- ⁵⁰ Mac Donald. (5)
- ⁵¹ Scheetz. (13)
- ⁵² The professor prefers to remain anonymous.
- ⁵³ Mac Donald. (11)
- ⁵⁴ This model assignment is included as part of a "course pack" for Central Michigan University's English 519. It was acquired by the author in 1994.
- ⁵⁵ My system-wide collection of freshman composition course syllabi turned up only a half-dozen syllabi that explicitly reject the process-oriented pedagogy favored by NCTE, 4Cs, and the International Reading Association. There might be more of those than the collection suggests who reject the process approach, but they are very probably not a majority by any means. It is also unfortunately the case that those who do shy away from postmodern pedagogy run a risk of censure in doing so and therefore are not especially eager to publicize their activity.
- ⁵⁶ Mac Donald. (6)
- ⁵⁷ Mac Donald. (7)
- ⁵⁸ Mac Donald. (9)
- ⁵⁹ No author given. The article bears the title "Students' Right to Their Own Language." The particular course in which the article is used is English 519, "Teaching Composition."
- ⁶⁰ *Standards for the English Language Arts*. (75)
- ⁶¹ This syllabus for Eastern Michigan University's freshman composition course, English 120, was acquired by the author in 1994.
- ⁶² Document acquired by the author. The language of this syllabus, which belongs more properly in a sociology course than in a freshman composition course, betrays the political biases of its author: No one, according to the radicalized compositionists, is an individual whose goal ought to be self-reliance, both intellectually and practically; but people are, rather, constructed and programmed by an oppressive system; even the notion of being an individual possessing a unique character unlike any other is supposed to be a delusion fostered by the system. Even as sociology this is dubious. After reading scores of such freshman composition syllabi, one wants to ask why the compositionists cannot commit themselves in plain terms to teaching their students how to express themselves in objective language following the rules of logic and

- ⁶³ Lynne Cheney. *Telling the Truth. Why Our Culture and Our Country Stopped Making Sense—and What We Can Do About It.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- ⁶⁴ Cheney. (79)
- ⁶⁵ Steve Kogan. “‘Discourse Production’: Composition in the Grip of Literary Studies.” *Academic Questions*. Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring 1994. (57)
- ⁶⁶ Document acquired by the author in 1994.
- ⁶⁷ J. L. Robinson. “Literacy in the English Department.” *College English*. Vol. 47, No. 5, September 1985. (485)
- ⁶⁸ Robinson. (485)
- ⁶⁹ Scheetz. (17)
- ⁷⁰ Personal memo from Koper to the author, October 17, 1995.
- ⁷¹ Document acquired by the author in 1995.
- ⁷² *CM Life* is the campus newspaper for Central Michigan University.
- ⁷³ George C. Leef. “How Well Do Schools Prepare Their Students?” *Viewpoint on Public Issues*, No. 93-22, October 4, 1993. Mackinac Center for Public Policy.
- ⁷⁴ Scheetz. (17)
- ⁷⁵ This term, “elitist,” seems to be inevitable nowadays in academic discourse, although the tiny minority who use it seem not to regard themselves as constituting an élite despite the fact that they have Ph.D.’s, teach in prestigious institutions, and receive handsome salaries from the state.
- ⁷⁶ Patrick McConeghy. “The New Paradigm and International Education: Of Babies and Bathwater.” *ADFL Bulletin*. Vol. 23, No. 3, Spring 1992. (34-41)
- ⁷⁷ McConeghy. (34)
- ⁷⁸ Document acquired by the author in 1994.
- ⁷⁹ Many, perhaps even most, of the prevailing theories in language and literature studies are Marxist by derivation if not by outright declaration. Marxism has been obsessed from the beginning with the dualistic warfare (the “class war”) between “the oppressors” and “the oppressed.” The two opening sentences of Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Part I, are “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” and “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Taylor’s translation 79). Ideologically, then, the prevailing theories in language and literature studies obsessively sacrifice mainstream traditions to marginal (what they sometimes call “oppositional”) elements usually at odds with the mainstream traditions. From the Marxist viewpoint, then, Turkish workers in Germany represent an oppressed class and are therefore more important to study than the German element in German culture. An “internationalist” course in Turkish language and literature would presumably devote itself to the study of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Analogous decisions appear everywhere in today’s university curricula, not just in language and literature studies. Anomalously, however, massively victimized groups, like the Jews in the German context, arouse relatively little interest among contemporary academics.
- ⁸⁰ McConeghy. (35)
- ⁸¹ McConeghy. (35)
- ⁸² McConeghy. (35)

⁸³ McConeghy. (35)

⁸⁴ Susan M. Bacon. "Coming to Grips with The Culture: Another Use of Dialogue Journals in Teacher Education." *Foreign Language Annals*. Vol. 28, No. 2, 1995. (193)

⁸⁵ Renée Scott and Barbara Rodgers. "Changing Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching Writing: A Collaborative Study." *Foreign Language Annals*. Vol. 28, No. 2, 1995. (234-246)

⁸⁶ Letter from Delaney to the author, July 15, 1995.

⁸⁷ The speaker prefers to remain anonymous.

⁸⁸ Scheetz. (17)

⁸⁹ Scheetz. (17)

⁹⁰ Matthew Arnold. "Literature and Science." In *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*. New York: Houghton and Mifflin (Riverside Editions). 1961.

⁹¹ Matthew Arnold. "Literature and Science." In *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*. New York: Houghton and Mifflin (Riverside Editions). 1961. (393)

⁹² Multiple authors. "The Humanities, In Memoriam." *Academic Questions*. Vol. 8, No. 1, Winter 1994-95. (60-66)

⁹³ Conquest. "The Humanities, In Memoriam." (60)

⁹⁴ Girard. "The Humanities, In Memoriam." (62)

⁹⁵ Wilson. "The Humanities, In Memoriam." (65)

⁹⁶ Wilson. "The Humanities, In Memoriam." (65)

⁹⁷ Presentation given at the 1995 meeting of the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in Big Rapids, Michigan. See *Michigan Academician*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, May 1995. (358)

⁹⁸ *The Dissolution of General Education*.

⁹⁹ A syllabus for a CMU course entitled American History to 1865 promises that, under the particular instructor's tutelage, "the important events of the past will be understood [by students] through the prism of gender, race, ethnicity, and class." In a list of "themes" to be discussed during the term, "witchcraft" and "the struggle for hegemony in North America" figure prominently. The War of Independence is characterized tendentiously as "Britain's Vietnam." Document acquired by the author in 1994.

¹⁰⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb. "What to do about Education: The Universities." *Commentary*. Vol. 98, No. 4, October 1994. (25)

¹⁰¹ See for example the special issue of *Continuity* (No. 19, Spring 1995), in which eleven historians discuss the peculiar biases of the standards.

¹⁰² Himmelfarb. (25)

¹⁰³ Himmelfarb. (24)

¹⁰⁴ Phone conversation between Zürcher and the author, April 1995.

¹⁰⁵ Documents supplied by Rita Zürcher and the National Association of Scholars, April, 1995

¹⁰⁶ *The Dissolution of General Education*. (61)

¹⁰⁷ Central Michigan University General Education Council internal memo authored by Professor of Philosophy George Stengren. Document acquired by the author in 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Internal memo critiquing proposed CMU English curricula. Document acquired by the author in 1993.

¹⁰⁹ Document acquired by the author in 1995. Regarding, as I call it, the intellectual emptiness of the “diversity” movement: What passes for “diverse” on contemporary college and university campuses is, in fact, ideologically monolithic. The “diversity” movement cynically uses the indices of color to make itself look like a celebration of geographical origin and ethnicity, but its putative representatives of “other cultures” invariably turn out to be subscribers to the radical agenda. Like so much in Newspeak of educationese, the term “diversity” means in practice the diametrical opposite of what it says.

¹¹⁰ In the winter semester 1995, CMU’s English department offered courses in women’s literature, African-American literature, science fiction, and other specialized and trendy topics, but only two regular courses in traditional literature.

¹¹¹ Internal memo critiquing proposed CMU English curricula. Document acquired by the author in 1993.

¹¹² Letter to the author, December 6, 1994.

¹¹³ *The Detroit News and Free Press*, Sunday, January 15, 1995. (1A)

¹¹⁴ *The Detroit News*, Friday, September 20, 1996. (1A)

¹¹⁵ *The Detroit News*, Friday, September 20, 1996. (5A)

Public K-12 student test statistics referred to in this article are as follows:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Proficient</u>	<u>Novice</u>
Math	47.7%	38.0%
Science	32.0	52.2
Reading	40.2	51.3
Writing	34.4	53.1

Source: Michigan Information & Research Service, Volume XIV, Issue 178

¹¹⁶ Robert Money. *Michigan Academician*. Summer 1995. (258)

¹¹⁷ The famous McGuffey’s readers had middle school students reading texts which they would not be expected to be able to read in today’s high schools; the high-school level McGuffey’s readers involved students in political and philosophical prose ranging from Plutarch and Cicero to Lincoln and Emerson.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Sowell. *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*. New York: The Free Press, 1993. (27)

¹¹⁹ Michigan State University *Description of Courses 1994*. The reference to the “construct[ion] of subject-specific meanings” echoes the language now used by the NCTE to describe how students learn—The theory is that students “construct” knowledge by themselves. This violates the common sense observation that learning consists of the transmission of knowledge from those who know to those who do not yet know.

¹²⁰ Central Michigan University *Bulletin 1994*.

¹²¹ Sowell. (25)

¹²² Description of proposed Central Michigan University teacher education course, Elementary Education 305, Issues in Multicultural Education. College of Education, Health, and Human Services memo, 1995.

¹²³ Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, and Hall. *The Foundations of American Education*. (153)

¹²⁴ As one part of the examination, students watch a film, *The Dead Poet’s Society*, and are asked to comment on it; the questions, reported to me by a student who went through the process, make it clear that students are

expected to affirm the slanted message of the film, namely that traditional education is an evil and oppressive experience and only radical theories of education are truly liberating.

¹²⁵ In other education textbooks too numerous to mention title by title, I find regularly repeated many dubious and simply false claims. Among the most flagrant of these is the claim that education before the advent in the 1960s of “new” and “progressive” pedagogies was tyrannical and ineffective—that students did not learn in America’s mid-twentieth century schools. This fails to explain why I knew grammar by the eighth grade, whereas the college students whom I teach today remain totally innocent of it; it again fails to explain why my mother, who graduated from high school in the early 1940s and never went to college, knows more about geography, history, math, English, and politics than most of the graduate students with whom I have contact. In fact, the historic decline in SAT and ACT scores began precisely when the “new” and “progressive” pedagogies began to take hold in the public schools.

¹²⁶ Martha Rapp Ruddell. *Teaching Content Reading and Writing*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992. (170)

¹²⁷ Ruddell. (104)

¹²⁸ Rita Kramer. *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America’s Teachers*. New York: Free Press (MacMillan’s), 1991.

¹²⁹ Kramer. (75)

¹³⁰ Michigan State University *Descriptions of Courses*. Teacher Education. 1995. (167-171)

¹³¹ Kramer. (83)

¹³² Kramer. (83-84)

¹³³ Kramer. (95)

¹³⁴ Kramer. (97)

¹³⁵ Kramer. (97-98)

¹³⁶ Kramer. (101) This prejudicial analysis of H. C. Andersen’s classic story provides another example of the ubiquity of what I would call low-grade Marxism, or Marxism-by-the-numbers, in the postmodern curriculum. As the holder of a B.A. in Scandinavian Languages and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, I would like to note that Kramer’s teacher has not understood the first thing about “The Ugly Duckling” which, like much of Andersen’s work, is symbolically complex, artistically rich, and ethically impeccable. In fact, “The Ugly Duckling,” taught by someone who understood it, would be a singularly appropriate study-text for teachers-in-training, since it urges individuals not to be satisfied with pat answers to important questions, with conformism for its own sake, or with bullying of any kind by those who, for reasons good or bad, are “in charge.”

¹³⁷ See *The Detroit News and Free Press*. Sunday, March 5, 1995. (1A)

¹³⁸ James V. Hoffman. “Leadership in the Language Arts: Am I Whole Yet? Are You?” *Language Arts*. Vol. 69, No. 5, September, 1992. (366-371) In respect of Hoffman’s anti-authoritarian rhetoric: Radical pedagogues often claim that teachers are an “oppressed class,” deprived of the “power” that would somehow transform their existence if the “oppressor class” would ever let them get their hands on it. Even university professors regularly claim to be “oppressed.” Just as grammar is supposed “to oppress” students, so teaching grammar is supposed “to oppress” teachers. Such claims suggest whole new categories of “oppressed people”: the Volvo-driving oppressed, the split-level oppressed, the oppressed-on-sabbatical, and the fully tenured oppressed.

¹³⁹ *Detroit Free Press*, Tuesday, September 24, 1996. (7A)

¹⁴⁰ Thomas F. Bertonneau. “Alice in Mandate Land.” *Viewpoint on Public Issues*. No. 95-02, January 9, 1995, Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

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- ¹⁴¹ *The Detroit News and Free Press*, Sunday, January 15, 1995. (1A)
- ¹⁴² *The Detroit News and Free Press*, Sunday, January 15, 1995. (1A)
- ¹⁴³ Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987. (1)
- ¹⁴⁴ Camille Paglia. *Vamps and Tramps*. New York: Vintage, 1994. (XXI)
- ¹⁴⁵ Friedrich A. von Hayek. *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. (75)
- ¹⁴⁶ William J. Bennett. *The De-Valuing of America: The Fight for our Culture and our Children*. New York: Simon and Schuster (A Touchstone Book), 1992. (172)
- ¹⁴⁷ Bennett. (172)
- ¹⁴⁸ Himmelfarb. (24)
- ¹⁴⁹ *NAS Update* (National Association of Scholars Newsletter). Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 1995. (1)
- ¹⁵⁰ *NAS Update*. (1)
- ¹⁵¹ *NAS Update*. (5)
- ¹⁵² The figure of 90 percent is conservative and is based on the author's review of 144 freshman composition syllabi from the state universities of Michigan.
- ¹⁵³ *Standards for the English Language Arts*. (38) In light of the dictum, it might be judicious to rename certain classic examples of writing. For example, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* could be redesignated *Shakespeare's Tentative Sonnets* and his play *Hamlet* could become *Sketches Toward a Possible Drama Provisionally Entitled Hamlet*.
- ¹⁵⁴ Tracey Lee Simmons. "Transcendental 'Meditations.'" *National Review*. September 12, 1994. (40-46)
- ¹⁵⁵ Simmons. (40-46)
- ¹⁵⁶ Simmons. (40-46)
- ¹⁵⁷ Allan Bloom. *Giants and Dwarfs*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. (290)
- ¹⁵⁸ Charles J. Sykes. *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*. New York: Regnery Gateway, 1988. (40)
- ¹⁵⁹ Jonathan R. Laing. "Campus Unrest." *Barron's*. November 22, 1995. (25-27)
- ¹⁶⁰ George Roche. *The Fall of the Ivory Tower. Government Funding, Corruption, and the Bankrupting of American Higher Education*. New York: Regnery Publishing, 1992. (217)
- ¹⁶¹ Laing. (27)
- ¹⁶² Roche. (219) Specific Michigan examples of this sort of academic discourse are found in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Volume 111, Number 6, November, 1996. Individuals from University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, and Michigan Technological University are either delivering the following papers or presiding over the following panels at the 112th annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in December, 1996 in Washington, D. C.
- The panel, "Constructing Sexual Identities" includes the following papers: "Revisioning Images of Women with a Medical Lens," "Purging the Female, Constructing the Male: Theorizing Monstrous Femininity in the Early Modern," "The Shadow of the Tribades and the Construction of Lesbianism in the Seventeenth Century." ("Tribade" is an arcane term for "lesbian.")

The papers, "Belgium in Politics and Print: Feminist Underground Journals," "Portrait of an Invert? Vita Sackville-West, Freud, and the Sexologists," and "Sex in Strindbergian Drama: Creating new Myths Out of Old Realities" will be given by representatives of Michigan public universities.

The panels, "Historicizing Queerness," "Culture War and Peace: The Dialogues of Chronotope in a Multicultural World," "Victorian Sexual Dissidence," "German Culture in Multicultural Perspective: Germans and Turks," "Alterity and its Discontents: Locus of Otherness Across Boundaries," "The Sociopathy of Domestic Space," "Scandinavian Sexuality: The Myth and its Fictions," and "Urnings, Inverts, and Beastly Acts of Female Indecency: Interwar Negotiations of Sexological Theories" are all either presided over by Michigan public university representatives, or contain papers given by them.

¹⁶³ Sykes. (109)

¹⁶⁴ Paglia. (101)

¹⁶⁵ Sykes. (309)

¹⁶⁶ Bertrand Russell. *The Study of Mathematics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1910. (73)

¹⁶⁷ Gertrude Himmelfarb. "Academic Advocates." *Commentary*. Vol. 100, NO. 3, September 1995. (47)

¹⁶⁸ A recent article concludes that decreasing scientific literacy in the United States is in part attributable to the dominance of postmodernism in higher education. See Janet Raloff. "When Science and Beliefs Collide." *Science News*. Vol. 149, No. 23. (360-361)

¹⁶⁹ For an example, see Paul Ernst. *The Philosophy of Mathematics Education*. London: The Falmer Press, 1991.

APPENDIX A

What Critics Say About Higher Education

The brutal reality is that the American system of education is bankrupt. Allowed to continue as it is, it will absorb ever more vast resources, without any appreciable improvement in the quality of its output, which is already falling behind world standards. Its educational failures cannot be justified, or even mitigated, by its many non-academic social goals, such as the psychological well-being of students, harmony among racial, ethnic, or other social groups, the prevention of teenage pregnancy, or the like. It has not merely failed in these areas but has been counterproductive.

—Thomas Sowell. *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*. New York: Free Press, 1993. (285)

[In American higher education,] the era between 1964 and 1993 witnessed a wholesale dissolution of curricular structure with highly specified requirements giving way to broad and nearly formless “distribution categories,” catchalls for a vast array of only distantly related courses.

As the number and variety of fixed requirements have shrunk or disappeared, it has simultaneously become easier to avoid those that remain.

Even more revealing is the very steep decline in the number of general education courses that all students must complete. Such courses reflect an institutional decision that every graduate will be exposed to specific subject matter it considers to be fundamental, and represent the strongest level of commitment to ensuring that there is indeed a common core of learning.

—*The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*. Report Prepared by the National Association of Scholars, 1996. (5, 6, 7)

[Regarding American higher education,] there has been a progressively more politicized, esoteric, and self-indulgent set of tendencies in academia, diluting and polluting academic endeavors with trendy ideological movements like “deconstructionism” in literature and “critical legal studies” in the law schools—to name just two. These symbolize the new scholasticism, with its inbred, self-congratulatory nihilism and its abdication of traditional responsibilities of training the young in fundamental intellectual disciplines, rather than the ideological fashions of the day. In addition to these signs of decadence in traditional fields, there have been developing new, so-called “inter-disciplinary” fields like feminist studies, ethnic studies, peace studies, and other semi-academic endeavors, more or less frankly propagandistic and politically activist, and less restrained by disciplinary canons still persisting and resisting complete politicization of the social sciences and humanities.

—Thomas Sowell. *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*. (295)

The prevalent unwillingness to set priorities within general education programs, together with the growing disinclination to insist on rigorous standards for completing them, suggests that undergraduate education has become substantially devalued as an institutional objective. It also indicates that most institutions are no longer seriously committed to ensuring that their students are exposed to broad surveys of basic subject matter.

—*The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*. Report Prepared by the National Association of Scholars, 1996. (61)

Within the academic village . . . the cult of meaninglessness is a many-splendored thing, eliminating as it does the need for historical study of works as well as the need for teachers to be familiar with all or even any of the traditionally accepted readings [of literary texts]. And if literature really doesn't mean anything in particular, critics are presented with what amounts to a blank slate to begin their speculations anew, because under the reign of theory, no reading is too outlandish, absurd, or bizarre—as long as it is obscure. The new term for this is “emancipated subjectivity.”

—Charles Sykes. *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1988. (184)

Accountability is the most important strategic objective to be achieved in colleges and universities, as it is in public schools. . . .

Accountability to the outside world must be maintained institutionally, for the sake of the internal sense of reality in academia itself. Otherwise, it is all too easy for academics to degenerate into self-indulgence at others' expense, including indulgence in self-flattering illusions.

—Thomas Sowell. *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*. (300, 302)

Every governor [ought] to . . . focus public attention and outrage on the way his state's public universities are being held hostage by the professors. Every legislature has a chance to restore accountability and ensure genuine access to learning. The politics of the situation alone should make such leadership attractive because it is increasingly obvious that the burdens of the failure of academia tend to fall not on the elites, but on the large middle class and on students at the lower end of the academic spectrum for whom a college education is the only hope of upward advancement. To a large extent the middle class is stuck in the academic gulags created by the professors' culture. It constitutes a potentially irresistible political force for reform.

Charles Sykes. *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education*. (261)

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Wherever I went in my year of crisscrossing the country from one college or university to another, whether in public institutions or on private campuses, in urban centers or in rural areas, I found a striking degree of conformity about what is considered to be the business of schools and the job of teachers.

Everywhere, I found idealistic people eager to do good. . . .

Hardly anywhere did I find a sense that any kind of knowledge is valuable in itself or more valuable than any other, a fact which ceased to surprise me once it became clear that among teacher-educators today, the goal of schooling is not considered to be instructional, let alone intellectual, but political.

—Rita Kramer. *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers*. New York: Free Press, 1991. (209)

Where the goal of the teacher is to promote self-esteem in everyone in equal measure, performance will no longer count for much. Nor will it seem to matter what is taught. . . .

Where the purpose of the educational system is to promote “self-esteem” regardless of actual accomplishment, substitutes for accomplishment must be found. . . .

Meanwhile, any criticism of this state of affairs is met with charges of elitism or, worse still, racism. No one in the ed school universe dares publicly to advocate a curriculum that resists the “cooperative learning,” the “multicultural” and “global” approach that is often a thinly disguised rejection of individualistic democratic values and institutions and of the very idea that underneath all our variety of backgrounds we Americans have been and should continue to become one nation, one culture. That aim and, in fact, any knowledge or appreciation of that common culture and the institutions from which it derives, I found to be conspicuously absent in the places that prepare men and women to teach in our country’s schools today.

—Rita Kramer. *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers*. (210-211)

Multiculturalism, in short, cannot be taken at face value, and that is what makes it so tricky. Nobody wants to appear to be against multiculturalism. Hence, the irresistible temptation of the postmodern 1960s, radical-left inhabitants of a political dreamland to use the term “multiculturalism” as a defense against exposure or criticism and to bring into service a vocabulary to which multiculturalism has an almost salacious attraction, words like “racist,” “sexist,” “homophobic.” To put matters bluntly: the multiculturalist rhetoric has the rest of us on the run, unable to respond for fear of being branded uncultural or racist, or (to get into the trendy academic lingo) complicit in the structures of hegemony imposed by the Eurocentric patriarchy and its strategies of domination.

In such a way does multiculturalism limit discussion. . . .

—Richard Bernstein. *Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future*. New York: Knopf, 1994. (7-8)

It is . . . imperative that we educate our students in the Western Tradition, that we teach them about the virtues of our society and its democratic institutions. Such education is the staunchest bulwark against the forces of disintegration we are facing.

The multiculturalists rant on about the repressive, inequitable nature of U.S. society. It is instructive to note, however, that people all over the world continue to flock here. They do so not because they believe the United States is perfect, but because they believe that the Western democratic traditions that govern this society will allow them greater freedom, economic opportunity, and personal dignity than they are likely to find anywhere else in the world. The multiculturalists notwithstanding, the choice facing us today is not between a “repressive” Western culture and a multicultural paradise, but between culture and barbarism.

—Roger Kimball. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. New York: Harper and Row, 1991. (206)

One of the techniques of opening young people up is to require a college course in a non-Western culture. Although many of the persons teaching such courses are real scholars and lovers of the areas they study, in every case I have seen the requirement—when there are so many other things that should be learned but are not required, when philosophy and religion are no longer required—has a demagogic intention. The point is to force students to recognize that there are other ways of thinking and that Western ways are not better. It is again not the content that counts but the lesson to be drawn. Such requirements are part of the effort to establish a world community and train its member—the person devoid of prejudice. But if the students were really to learn something of the minds of any of these non-Western cultures—which they do not—they would find that each and every one of these cultures is ethnocentric. All of them think their way is the best way. . . .

Only in the Western nations, i.e., those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one’s own way.

—Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987. (35-36)

Today, a good many professors accept the Marxist indictment of bourgeois society and culture while rejecting any notion of a “real, positive science” or any other kind of truth. In the now familiar race/class/gender trinity that has replaced Marx’s monolithic class doctrine, there is no room for transcendent truth or knowledge.

—Gertrude Himmelfarb. “Academic Advocates.” *Commentary*. Vol. 100, No. 3. September 1995. (47)

In recent years, some activists have been remarkably frank about the political goals they have for education. Betty Jean Craige of the University of Georgia argues that “multiculturalism” has the happy “potential for ideologically disuniting the nation.” As American students learn more about the virtues of other nations, she writes, they will be less and less likely to think this country deserves their special support. They will not respond to calls to use American force, and thus we will be delivered from the dark days of the early 1990s, when President George Bush was able to unify the nation in support of war against Iraq, and be able to return to the golden days of the late 1960s and early 1970s when no president was able to build support for Vietnam.

—Lynne Cheney. *Telling the Truth: Why Our Culture and Our Country Have Stopped Making Sense—and What We Can Do About It*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. (29)

Composition courses have become particularly susceptible to ideological teaching. Writing in such periodicals as the *Journal of Advanced Composition* and *College English*, composition teachers offer advice on how to inform such courses with “political consciousness and social action” so that students will become “social activists.” They discuss how to tailor “liberatory pedagogy” so as to bring students from different social and economic backgrounds to “a critical awareness of the constrictions in their own class position.” One would not want, for example, to use the same methods on students from upper-class backgrounds who “have the financial and emotional security to be open to progressive pedagogy and even radical politics” that one would use on middle-class students who “reflect the reflex conservatism of uncritical subordination to established social order and authority.”

—Lynne Cheney. *Telling the Truth: Why Our Culture and Our Country Have Stopped Making Sense—and What We Can Do About It*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. (80)

If the level of prose style in English studies today is abysmally low, it is because the values that support good writing are themselves under attack. It is a premise among many compositionists, for example, that clarity and correctness are subjective categories determined “by who holds the political power to decide what constitutes good language use.” In *College English*, the idea is ritually intoned and virtually writes itself: the “discursive rules” of freshman composition “assign students to their proper place in the institutional hierarchies of corporate capitalism,” “rhetoric . . . is ideological,” “the ‘standards’ of literary criticism reflect ideals promulgated by those in power,” and language and literacy play a role “in perpetuating and justifying hegemonic practices.” Those who speak on behalf of standards in writing are often scorned as “gatekeepers” or “gatekeeper intellectuals.”

The condition of the discipline is such that, by now, traditional models of teaching are routinely disparaged.

—Steve Kogan. “‘Discourse Production’: Composition in the Grip of Literary Theory.” In *Academic Questions*. Vol. 7, No. 2. Spring 1994. (56)

ENGLISH GRAMMAR is the art of speaking, reading, and writing the English language correctly. It is divided into four parts; namely, Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody. Orthography treats of letters, syllables, separate words, and spelling. Etymology treats of the different parts of speech, with their classes and modifications. Syntax treats of the relation, agreement, government, and arrangement of words, in sentences. Prosody treats of punctuation, utterance, figures, and versification.

—*The Institutes of English Grammar* (1886). (Once widely used in Michigan high schools.)

Every writing theory of the past 30 years has come up with reasons why it's not necessary to teach grammar and style. For the multiculturalists, the main reason is that grammatical errors signify that the author is politically engaged. According to Min-Zhan Lu of Drake University, the "individual consciousness is necessarily heterogeneous, contradictory, and in process. The writer writes at the site of conflict."

It is the goal of current writing theory to accentuate that conflict.

—Heather Mac Donald. "Why Johnny Can't Write." *The Public Interest*. No. 120. Summer 1995. (11)

The teaching of grammar as part of writing instruction is essential because the dialect of Standard Written English is *not* the native dialect of any speaker. To learn to write, students must master many new patterns of usage. To repeat in writing the conventions of one's native dialect is to be cut off from the enormous international culture of which Standard Written English is the ground. Grammar is not elitist. It is rather quintessentially democratizing, the ability to use Standard Written English being the condition for participating in public life in this country and in much of the rest of the world.

—Peter T. Koper, Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Central Michigan University.

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APPENDIX B

What Postmodern Professors Say

All teaching supposes ideology; there is simply no value-free pedagogy. For these reasons, my paradigm of composition is changing to one of critical literacy, a literacy of political consciousness and social action.*

Teachers need to recognize that methodology alone will not ensure radical visions of the world. An appropriate course content is necessary as well. . . . The teacher must recognize that he or she must influence (perhaps manipulate is the more accurate word) students' values through charisma or power—he or she must accept his role as manipulator. There it is of course reasonable to try to inculcate into our students the conviction that the dominant order [of American society] is repressive.**

—*James Laditka. "Semiology, Ideology, Praxis: Responsible Authority in the Composition Classroom." *Journal of Advanced Composition*. Fall 1990. (361)

—**Charles Paine. "Relativism, Radical Pedagogy, and the Ideology of Paralysis." *College English*. October 1989. (563-64)

Science Studies 432. *Science and Parascience*. The goal of this course is to examine open-mindedly several "alternate visions" of the nature and origin of human life in light of the attitudes and objectives associated with science. Topics examined: astrology, future-prediction, "harmonies" between entities, ESP, telepathy, the aura, PK, UFO's, extraterrestrial life, ancient astronauts, and others.

—Catalog description of a course offered at Western Michigan University, 1993-1995. (149)

Most writing instructors who teach cultural criticism have been taught how to teach writing and examine areas, including the cultural text, critically. A person educated in Marxist theory would likely examine culture through a Marxist perspective. My dissertation is on social constructionism, and I examine society by using elements of social-constructionist thought as heuristics. . . . Many who engage in cultural criticism have been trained to closely examine texts from a theoretical perspective—it is a reasonable leap to examining culture from a theoretical perspective.

—William J. Rouster, Wayne State University. "Reply to Maxine Hairston." *College Composition and Communication*. May 1993. (253)

Women's Studies 496. *Senior Seminar in Women's Studies*. [This course is] a multi-disciplinary, capstone course in Women's Studies integrating various approaches to feminist theory, methodology, and research. Through this course diverse women's experiences will be examined.

—Catalog description of a course offered at Central Michigan University, 1993-1995. (82)

As every graduate student knows, only a fool would try to think or bear witness to events objectively any more, and only an intellectual crook would claim to have done so. . . . Writers . . . [should] make themselves their main subject matter, since one's own self is the only subject one can really know.*

We know now that knowledge is always "biased," and that the mask of objectivity hides every form of prejudice. The supposedly "disinterested" scholars of the 50's . . . were in the thrall of state power, whether they knew it or not. They were protecting their own class interests, distorting history for unacknowledged ends, teaching literature in ways that suited their hidden agendas. In short, they wanted to preserve the elitist culture in which they had grown comfortable.**

—*Tracy Kidder, from his introduction to *Best American Essays 1994* (cited in *Academic Questions*, Spring 1995 [48])

—**Professor Jay Parini, Middlebury College (cited in *Academic Questions*, Spring 1993 [77])

We have tremendous power, as teachers, to influence the direction in which this country will move as we approach the twenty-first century. White students need an inclusive curriculum and "oppositional" pedagogy as much as "ethnic" students do. We must not lose sight of the ultimate purpose of "revolutionary" pedagogies: educating students who will work to make this planet a better place to live.

—Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Spelman College (cited in *Academic Questions*, Spring 1993 [76]).

The attacks on the humanities, and in particular on the teaching of culture, literature, and language, that have been launched over this past year have been frightening. . . . Equally appalling for me have been the attacks on our profession by our own colleagues. These relentless attacks on the humanities in general and on the MLA in particular have given comfort to those who desire to downsize and eventually bury our entire system of higher education. Scholars have attacked other scholars as the embodiment of the beast.

—Sander Gilman, President of the Modern Language Association 1995-96. in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*. May 1996. (391)

American Culture 410. *Women in Prison: Gender and Crime Among Blacks and Latinas.* The papers will be an exploration of life of women in prison. Interviews will be scheduled at the prison. Students will explore a different methodology. This approach for writing papers will be a Human Science perspective. It is a way of becoming more aware of the world. It is the study of everyday experiences of human beings as they participate in their existence. In this approach, abstract categories and scientific constructs of our world are rooted in everyday experiences.

—Description of a University of Michigan course taken from *Comedy and Tragedy 1996-1997*, a survey compiled by Young America's Foundation.

English Language and Literature 417. *Weird Science: Warped Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries.* This course asks students to analyze some of the ways in which American writers have explored “weird science” to make points about their society and times. From one angle, then, it’s a course on science fiction, from another it’s an examination of a special form of cultural critique. Topics to be explored include spiritualism, mediums, trances, and utopian visions, but also dystopias, technology, and the uncanny world of Edgar Allan Poe. My interests will be in gender images, settled and unsettling; and the ways in which “weird science” lends itself to social commentary, though not on every topic imaginable.

—Description of a University of Michigan course taken from *Comedy and Tragedy 1996-1997*, a survey compiled by Young America’s Foundation.

The orientation along the axis of class privilege is made increasingly systematic by the application of related discursive constraints. Primary interfaces, for example, also generally serve to reproduce the privileged position of standard English as the language of choice or default, and, in this way, contribute to the tendency to ignore, or even erase, the cultures of non-English language background speakers in this country.*

When teaching first-year writing classes, I usually introduce the multicultural approach to student writing style around the mid-point of the term, when I feel that students are beginning to apply to their actual practices a view of writing as a process of re-seeing.**

—*Cynthia L. Selfe and Richard J. Selfe. “The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones.” *College Composition and Communication*. December 1994. (488)

—**Min-Zhan Lu. “Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone.” *College Composition and Communication*. December 1994. (449)

The latter part of the twentieth century has seen an alarming rise of individual acts of hate-violence. While organized hate groups do advocate and promulgate violence, much, if not most, hate-violence is not the work of people associated with organized hate-groups. Singling out individuals for apparently random attack because of their sex, skin color, ethnicity, religion, presumed or known affectational identification is a pattern of both historical and contemporary significance [in the United States]. . . .

While no national data on the incidence of racial, ethnic, anti-gay and lesbian and sexual violence exists, there is a remarkable and generally unchallenged consensus that hate-violence is not only extensive but that it may well be increasing in incidence and brutality.

—Carole Sheffield. “Hate Violence.” In Paula S. Rothenberg (editor). *Race, Class, and Gender: An Integrated Study*. New York: St. Martins Press. 1995. (433-34) [Widely used in a variety of courses in the state universities of Michigan.]

The social transformation of female and male physiology into a condition of inequality is well illustrated by the bathroom problem. Most buildings that have gender-segregated bathrooms have an equal number for women and for men. Where there are crowds, there are always long lines in front of women’s bathrooms but rarely in front of men’s bathrooms. Thus, although an equal number of bathrooms seems fair, equity would mean more women’s bathrooms or allowing women to use men’s bathrooms for a certain amount of time.

The bathroom problem is the outcome of the way gendered bodies are differentially evaluated in Western cultures. . . .

—Judith Lorber. “The Social Construction of Gender.” In Paula S. Rothenberg. *Race, Class, and Gender: An Integrated Study*. (41)

All pedagogic action . . . is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power . . . [Bourgeois oppression] manifests itself in the tendency to move from particular case to particular case, from illustration to parable, or to shun the bombast of fine words and the turgidity of grand emotions, through banter, rudeness and ribaldry, manners of being and doing characteristic of the severance between objective denotation and subjective connotation.

—Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education and Society*. (199) [Influential source of postmodern thinking in education]

The postmodern quest for multiculturalism in recanonization has brought with it the problem of teachers choosing to speak for writers, texts, and students who are—in opposition to the teacher as a raced, classed, and gendered self—Others [*sic.*]. This opens up the danger that, in making the choice to represent minority literatures, members of the hegemonic order may be perceived as appropriating, rather than representing, those works.

Moreover, the same problematic exists in composition courses where hegemony dictates the voices of minority students and their writings, and must judge the students' work as valid or flawed. Yet if the teacher, lacking the experience which minority students bring to bear on their discourse, cannot truly speak from that experience as a common ground with the writer, can s/he speak *for* the writer and the work?

This paper will provide an overview of the current heated debates taking place in the language field over this issue, and provide an outline for a course of ethical self-evaluation that teachers must at all times undergo if they are to avoid continued oppression and appropriation of students and their discourses. . . . We will build upon Peter McLaren's theory of "enfleshment" and argue for constant awareness of the cultural and moral dangers inherent in postmodernism's pedagogical freedom.

—Christy Rioshi Minadeo and Larry Juchartz (Departments of English and American Studies, Michigan State University). Abstract of their paper "The Rhetoric of Enfleshment: Teachers as Constructed Selves Engaged in the Discourse of Others." *Michigan Academician*. Vol. XXVII, No. 3. May 1995. (362)

[Teachers must assist students] to engage in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate [the] knowledge and beliefs [that will] displace the repressive ideologies an unjust social order would prescribe. . . . We must be forthright in avowing the ideologies that motivate our teaching and research. [If] a teacher tells his students he is Marxist but disavows any intention of persuading them to his point of view . . . he might [instead] openly state that [his] course aims to promote values of sexual equality and left-oriented labor-relations and that [his] course will challenge students' values insofar as they conflict with these aims. [Teachers] should openly exert their authority [and] try to persuade students to agree with their values. . . .

—Patricia Bizzell. "Beyond Anti-Foundationalism to Rhetorical Authenticity: Problems in Defining 'Cultural Literacy.'" *College English*. No. 52. (661)

If we can convince our students that spelling, punctuation, and usage are less important than content, we have removed a major obstacle in their developing the ability to write.

[Historically,] people from different language and ethnic backgrounds were denied social privileges, legal rights, and economic opportunity, and their inability to manipulate the dialect used by the privileged group was used as an excuse for this denial. . . . With only slight modifications, many of our “rules,” much of the “grammar” we still teach, reflects that history. . . .

—Statement from materials for Central Michigan University’s course English 519, Teaching Composition. [Original source not identified by the instructor-compiler.]

When social and economic changes increased social mobility, the members of the “rising middle class,” recently liberated and therefore immediately threatened by the lower class, demanded books of rules telling them how to act in ways that would not betray their background and would solidly establish them in their newly acquired social group. Rules regulating social behavior were compiled in books of etiquette; rules regulating linguistic behavior were compiled in dictionaries and grammar books. Traditional grammar books were unapologetically designed to instill linguistic habits . . . intended to separate those who had “made it” from those who had not, the powerful from the poor.

—Statement from materials for Central Michigan University’s course English 519, Teaching Composition. [Original source not identified by the instructor-compiler.]

Instructors [of CMU’s Freshman Composition course] should use effective means in dealing with errors of usage and mechanics in student papers. The most convincing research on this subject suggests that time spent addressing the entire class on matters of grammatical terminology and concepts is largely wasted. Instructors are encouraged to deal with student errors on an individual basis, identifying errors for students, keeping records on student progress . . . and using class time for peer editing and proofreading.*

Grammar is prejudicial, oppressive, and elitist.**

—*Master Syllabus for English 101 at Central Michigan University. 1994.

—**From a lecture delivered by a senior writing specialist, Department of English Language and Literature, CMU (from notes taken by a student). 1994.

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. . . . We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

—Resolution of the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1972. In *College Composition and Communication*. October 1972. (325)

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He is a member of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, the National Association of Scholars, and the Modern Language Association. Dr. Bertonneau has taught courses including American literature, literary theory, freshman composition, science fiction, mythology, and the poetry and prose of the romantic era, at UCLA, CMU, and in the CMU Extended Degree Program.

His students nominated him for a teaching excellence award in 1993.

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