



## College Quarterly

Spring 2009 - Volume 12 Number 2

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### Response to Professor Mulcahy

*By Geoffrey C. Kellow*

D.G. Mulcahy's "Energizing Liberal Education" compellingly contends that the long-term viability of liberal education depends upon both methodological and curricular diversification aimed at the "many sided development" of the student. Professor Mulcahy thoughtfully espouses both the cultivation of intellect eloquently championed by Cardinal Newman and a pedagogically holistic approach to the student that speaks to her "emotional, moral and spiritual formation." As undeniably admirable as Professor Mulcahy's vision may be, I would like to suggest two important impediments to its realization, the first being a question of practice, the second, of principle.

Professor Mulcahy suggests that any reinvigoration of liberal education depends upon fundamentally transforming the classroom and curriculum liberal education presents. Turning to the question of practice, I must confess it is hard to envision how resource-starved colleges and universities could rally the resources needed to fund Professor Mulcahy's vision. The energized education envisioned requires more classroom hours and, in the varied and student-centred approach of knowledge production models, a much lower student-teacher ratio than most institutions are in a position to provide. It seems equally unlikely that governments, faculties and administrators are either equipped, or in some cases even inclined, to find mechanisms for evaluating the new social components of education Professor Mulcahy advocates.

However, I would like to challenge Professor Mulcahy's vision of liberal education's reform on grounds more fundamental than mere fiscal practicality. Professor Mulcahy's paper draws laudable attention to the contentious relationship between the "what" of curriculum and the "how" of pedagogy but in that exercise he neglects the relationship between these two interrogatives and the primordial 'why' of liberal education. Professor Mulcahy's "multifaceted and varied" approach entails vastly increasing the scope of pedagogic intervention in the life of the student. It is difficult to see, given the range and depth of this education, despite Professor Mulcahy's qualifications to the contrary, how such an education would respect the intellectual autonomy of the student. Such an intense education, engaging the student morally, emotionally and spiritually, could not help but promote particular visions of the public and private good, as opposed to others. Such an education, in its very substance and construction, moves beyond providing fruitful questions and critical engagements to promoting concrete answers. Such innovations seem ill suited to the ultimate "why" of liberal education, the development of critical, autonomous thought and action.

Both the 'what' and the 'how' of liberal education require reinvigoration. Both curriculum and pedagogy must find ways to redefine themselves in the service of continuing relevance. Nevertheless, such redefinition cannot occur at the expense of losing sight of liberal education's essential 'why.'

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