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A TWENTIETH-
CENTURY COSMOS:

THE NEW PLAN AND
THE ORIGINS OF
GENERAL EDUCATION
AT CHICAGO

JOHN W. BOYER

XVI
OCCASIONAL PAPERS
ON HIGHER
EDUCATION XVI

THE COLLEGE
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

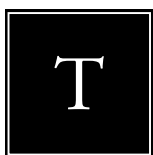


Ferdinand Schevill, undated photograph by Norman F. Maclean.

A T W E N T I E T H -
C E N T U R Y C O S M O S :

*The New Plan and the Origins of
General Education at Chicago*

I N T R O D U C T I O N



he academic year 2006–07 is well begun. In important respects, the state of the College can be illustrated by the fact that our first-year class is once again the most academically talented in our history and that we have sustained a historic high in the retention of first-year College students—that is, 96 percent of our fall 2005 first-year students returned to the College in the fall of 2006. Given the chronic problems that the College once had in retaining students to graduation, the progress we have made in reducing attrition and enhancing retention is one of the most significant developments in the modern history of the College.

We have also seen much more positive attitudes about the College and the University in recent College graduating classes, another sign that the expansion of the College and the transformation of our programmatic approaches to student life have gone in favorable directions. At Reunion last spring, the First-Year Reunion of the Class of 2005 met and exceeded its gift totals, and the morale among these young alumni leaders was outstanding. The recent successes of our Senior Class Gift committees—including a record rate of participation and level of giving by the Class of 2006—illustrate the same phenomenon: our seniors are

This essay was originally presented as the Annual Report to the Faculty of the College on October 31, 2006. John W. Boyer is the Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of History and the College, and Dean of the College.

proud of the College and the University, and are willing to band together to help us.

Beyond these high points are other strengths. The Core curriculum, which the faculty restructured in 1998, remains a more robust and manageable program from the point of view of both students and teachers. Our students continue to have access to their top choices when registering for the Core, and faculty participation in the Core is strong. Since the Core reforms of 1998, we can point to many other ways in which our curriculum continues to be strengthened and renewed: new study abroad programs, new and reinvigorated majors, a program of minors in selected departments and interdisciplinary programs, planned clusters in which students may use their free electives in writing, theater, and multidisciplinary areas like Human Rights and Big Problems, increased participation in language study beyond the beginning level, strong tutoring programs, and many new research and language study grant opportunities for College students. I am especially pleased that we have been able to secure endowments for research grants for College students in the Departments of Comparative Human Development, English Language & Literature, History, Philosophy, Physics, and Psychology, and I look forward to the day when we will have such programs in each of our departments. We are a liberal arts college at the center of a great research university, and we aim to teach our students the skills and virtues of the scholar. Surely we should do everything humanly possible to introduce our College students to the passions and the pleasures, the risks and frustrations, the courage and ultimately the fearlessness of original research.

All of this is an extraordinary achievement and one in which the College's faculty and staff can take great pride. The College that our students attend today is the envy of its more senior alumni, some of whom still tell me that they got a great education but had an unpleasant experience

on campus, and will also happily add that they wish we had done for them in their era all that we are doing for our students now—academically, socially, and culturally. Our successors a generation hence will be grateful for the College that our students learn in and enjoy today. As much as the current generation of students depends on our dedication to the high ideals of teaching and learning, all of us depend on our past for the vigorous institutional life of those ideals.

Universities are communities of memory. They assemble people who wish to learn about and to profit from the great achievements of humankind and of nature, much of the latter accomplished in and remembered from the past. At the same time, universities themselves are also creatures of history, of past lives, past ideals, past sentiments. They are repositories of memory and affection, the products of generations of intellectual exchanges and friendships, always enriched by new members, and always remembering and being remembered by members who went before. Finally, universities are communities that seek to shape the future, because they understand that they have the power and the privilege to use the achievements of our common past to define the ways by which we will think about what we want our future to be. Their instrumental investment in the present, their reflective observation of our past, and their ambition to chart our future all depend on the powerful and honorable work of memory.

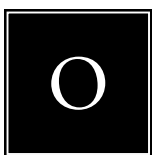
One of the most effective instruments of our University to sustain this tripartite memory work has been the College's curriculum. A curriculum is more than a set of formal prescriptions and requirements. It is a statement of basic values and a way by which the faculty can assert what is educationally important and what is not, and how it wishes to organize its own work, based on past traditions and past experience. The curriculum also comes to constitute the cognitive framework through

which our alumni remember their intellectual accomplishments while on campus, giving them a special sense of having lived and been transformed in a special place. And our curriculum is a public commitment and a public affirmation that we will educate our students for the kind of future—humane, tolerant, enlightened—that all of us esteem and hope will always come to pass.

Since the 1930s, the College's curriculum has been most noted for its tradition of general education. Indeed this year is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the launching of the first Core courses, and it is thus an appropriate time to pause and consider what these courses were, how they came about, how they embedded themselves in our institutional consciousness, and how they managed to sustain themselves or their offspring in the decades that followed. A few years ago Arnold Rampersad of Stanford University, who once taught at Columbia University in New York City, observed that the Core curricula of universities like Columbia and Chicago were like the federal interstate highway system—you could never build them the same way again, but since they exist, you can take care of them, keep them functioning, and help them to achieve the educational objectives that are rather unique to such special systems of liberal education.¹ In the rest of my remarks today, I want to explore how that “highway system” came to be built, who built it, why they built it, and what we should do with it now.

1. See Charles McGrath, “What Every Student Should Know,” January 8, 2006, <http://websrv.ewu.edu/groups/academicaffairs/strategicplanning/TimesArticle.rtf>. I am extremely grateful to Daniel Koehler and Michael Jones for their assistance on this essay. I am also grateful to Leon Botstein, Terry N. Clark, Martin E. Feder, Hanna H. Gray, Paul H. Jordan, Ralph Lerner, Joel Snyder, William Veeder, and Katy Weintraub for answering questions about specific individuals or events that are discussed in this essay.

THE NEW PLAN AND
THE CREATION OF A GENERAL
EDUCATION PROGRAM



Our traditions of general education date back to the late 1920s, when a group of colleagues at Chicago decided to revolutionize the world of higher education by creating what was called the New Plan, a bold attempt to synthesize broad fields of knowledge in an explicitly interdisciplinary framework for first- and second-year students in the College. The New Plan was our first Core curriculum, and the current curriculum, passed in 1998, owes much to the spirit and practices of the New Plan.

The New Plan was the brainchild of Dean Chauncey S. Boucher, about whom I have written in the past. Briefly, during the late 1920s, Boucher came to be dissatisfied both with the level of intellectual accomplishment of undergraduates at Chicago and with the marginal and lackadaisical way in which the University treated undergraduate education. Even before Robert Hutchins assumed the presidency in the summer of 1929, Boucher had conducted a lobbying campaign to create a new curriculum of general education courses based on a comprehensive examination system and a new approach to undergraduate education.² Boucher was convinced that a more challenging and more imaginative

2. See Chauncey S. Boucher, "Suggestions for a Reorganization of Our Work in the Colleges, and a Restatement of Our Requirements for the Bachelor's Degree," December 1927, *Archive of the College*, Box 27, folder 6; and "Report of the Senate Committee on the Undergraduate Colleges," May 7, 1928, *ibid.*, folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; unless otherwise noted, all archival documents cited in this essay are located in the center.

curriculum would attract intellectually stronger students to Chicago, and he was prepared to gamble that the University could find ways to enhance student quality and commitment. Even though Chicago might lose a significant share of its weaker and less committed students, they would soon be replaced by

a better type of student; the young people of the United States are keen enough to recognize the best to be had in education quite as quickly or even more quickly than in any other line, and are interested enough in their own welfare and development to seek the best wherever it is to be found; therefore, these Eastern men [scholars with whom Boucher had consulted] predicted, if Chicago were to adopt such a plan as here outlined, it would at once be recognized the country over as a performance superior to the old stereotyped and almost universal plan, and in a short time Chicago would have more applicants of better quality than ever before.³

For his basic instructional models Boucher adapted and expanded the structural idea of an interdisciplinary, transdepartmental “survey course” for freshmen in the natural sciences, entitled “The Nature of the World and Man,” that H. H. Newman and others had organized for sixty students each year beginning in 1924. This course, whose major organizing theme was the trajectory of human evolution, was taught on a two-quarter cycle, and by 1928 had 240 students. The Newman course aimed “to make clear the fact that all science is one and that there are no

3. Boucher, “Supplementary Statement,” May 1, 1928, p. 16, *ibid.*



Chauncey S. Boucher, undated photograph by Norman F. Maclean.

hard and fast lines between its various branches.” Newman and his colleagues (who included Rollin T. Chamberlin, Anton J. Carlson, Harvey B. Lemon, Merle Coulter, Fay-Cooper Cole, Julius Stieglitz, and Charles H. Judd) had the striking goal in mind of presenting students with “a general philosophic view that will rationalize all of the order and unity in the natural universe.”⁴ Boucher used this course as a template for his larger and more ambitious plans to restructure the undergraduate curriculum as a whole.⁵

Once Robert Hutchins had determined in 1930 to restructure the University to create four separate graduate divisions, it became logical to create an administratively separate College as well.⁶ Boucher’s conceptual ideas on a new curriculum and Hutchins’s structural reforms converged, and beginning in late December 1930 Boucher chaired an ad hoc curriculum committee that crafted, over the course of two months, a curriculum for the College whose centerpiece was to be a set of four year-long general survey courses.⁷ The new survey courses were

4. H. H. Newman, “The Nature of the World and of Man,” *Archive of the College*, Box 5, folder 4. In 1926, Newman also published a formidable 550-page book, bringing together essays of sixteen collaborators who taught in the course, entitled *The Nature of the World and of Man* (Chicago, 1926).

5. Chauncey S. Boucher, *The Chicago College Plan* (Chicago, 1935), p. 17.

6. See John W. Boyer, *The Organization of the College and the Divisions in the 1920s and 1930s* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 10–64.

7. The committee solicited reactions from the faculty, and received a number of thoughtful commentaries in late January 1931, which are filed in *Presidents’ Papers 1925–1945*, Box 19, folder 9. The final proposal, dated February 7, 1931, is in *ibid.*, folder 8. Hutchins followed the work of the committee closely and met with it at least twice to discuss its progress. *Presidents’ Papers* hereafter cited as *PP*.

to be administered by clusters of faculty drawn from the four divisions, but under the administrative and curricular aegis of the separate College.⁸ Originally, Boucher intended that most of the faculty participating in the College had to have simultaneous departmental memberships. It is of great importance to remember that Boucher had no intention of creating a faculty separate from and in opposition to the departments and divisions. The University Senate concurred in this view when it authorized the College in 1932 to hire faculty members who did not have departmental memberships, but cautioned that “it is considered desirable that a large proportion of the College faculty be members of Departments and Divisional faculties.”⁹

Boucher was well aware that the audience for his new program consisted of many students who sought careers in the professions or in business and not in academic life.¹⁰ Hence he tried to make his vision appealing to a broad range of students, stressing the timeliness and functional utility of a general education program for students who wished to

8. See Chauncey Boucher, “Procedures to Put the Plan into Operation,” November 1930, *Archive of the College*, Box 10, folder 2. A convenient overview of the actual plan is offered by “First Year of New Plan in the College,” *ibid.* See also Boucher to Hutchins, October 16, 1930, with a memo on “The College Curriculum,” *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 19, folder 7.

9. “Minutes of the University Senate,” November 19, 1932.

10. See Chauncey S. Boucher, *The New College Plan of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1930), pp. 5–6, 9, 14. A survey undertaken in 1932 of prospective student careers found that 27 percent of the male students intended careers in law; 20 percent in medicine; and 16 percent in business, advertising, or engineering. Seven percent intended careers in teaching and 17 percent in science, with 5 percent wanting careers in journalism. See Robert C. Woellner, “The Selection of Vocations by the 1932 Freshmen of the University of Chicago,” *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 6.

undertake careers in business, law, and medicine. Boucher insisted that “[g]eneral education provides the basis for an intelligent discharge of these larger responsibilities which inevitably come to the man or woman who is really successful in a profession or vocation.” But even for those who did desire academic careers, general education was vital because “the specialist in any field should be characterized by the wealth of his knowledge of many fields. To be only an expert results in a one-sided personality and limited usefulness.”¹¹ All of this was to connect the New Plan to the world, and to emphasize its relevance for professional careers outside as well as inside of the academy.

After securing the approval of the new curriculum by a vote of 65 to 24 at a general meeting of the faculty of the College in early March 1931, and after conferring with the newly appointed divisional Deans and with key department chairmen, Chauncey Boucher set out to organize four planning groups to create the new survey courses. The groups worked quickly and assembled necessary course materials, which Boucher found the funds to purchase. Each course produced a detailed syllabus, which included a prose outline of the major arguments and material of the course together with detailed bibliographical citations for further reading. Substantial investments in books and equipment had to be made. Boucher also held several meetings in the spring of 1931 where all staff leaders met jointly, to work out logistical and scheduling issues. Slowly, the appearance of a unified curriculum emerged. A key feature of the new general education curriculum was that it would not depend on course grades but on six-hour final comprehensive exams administered by an independent Office of the Examiner, headed by Professor Louis L.

11. *Education and Careers* (Chicago, n.d.), p. 1. The pamphlet is unsigned, but was clearly written by Boucher or under his direction.

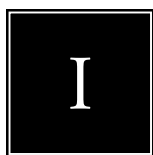
Thurstone, a distinguished psychologist who did pioneering research in psychometrics and psychophysics. Students could pace themselves through the curriculum, taking the final comprehensives whenever they felt prepared to do so. The idea of individual agency, cast as the autonomy of student freedom, was a central feature of the logic of the New Plan.¹²

Attendance at the general education survey courses was not mandatory to prepare for the comprehensive exams, although in most cases most students seem to have attended the course lectures. Students could register either for *R*'s or for advisory grades, and most of the courses offered quarterly exams, papers, and quizzes that were intended to serve an advisory function, allowing a student to measure his or her progress within the course. The advisory grades did not convey graduation credit, however, since the comprehensive exams were the basis of receiving the College's certificate.¹³ Grades were thus used only as advisory instruments, or to facilitate transfer credit if a student opted to move to another college.

12. For the history of the Board of Examinations, see Benjamin S. Bloom, "Changing Conceptions of Examining at the University of Chicago," in Paul L. Dressel, ed., *Evaluation in General Education* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1954), pp. 297–321.

13. "The marks made in the comprehensive examinations, and not the quarterly reports, constitute the final record for purposes of fulfilling College requirements, awarding scholarships and honors, and fulfilling requirements for admission to a Division." A. J. Brumbaugh to M. C. Coulter *et al.*, October 15, 1936, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.

THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES
GENERAL COURSES



In the natural sciences, Boucher had the advantage of being able to draw upon a group of men who had already participated in “The Nature of the World and Man.” The world of the natural sciences at Chicago in the late 1920s was exciting, filled with ambitious scholars who were optimistic about the progress of their disciplines and certain that the new knowledge of modern science could be made both appealing to and relevant for a general undergraduate audience. The primary architect of the biology course was Merle C. Coulter from the Department of Botany. Coulter was the son of John M. Coulter, the founder of modern botany at Chicago, with whom the younger Coulter had collaborated in writing a book defending modern evolutionary theories in 1926.¹⁴ He was a product of Chicago, having received his undergraduate degree in 1914 and his Ph.D. in 1919. As a young assistant professor, Merle Coulter had been a collaborator in “The Nature of the World and Man” project, preparing a chapter of the textbook that accompanied that course. In 1930, he was an associate professor of botany—a man of considerable diplomatic skill and an inspiring teacher. He did not enjoy the research reputation of his father, which he always regretted, but the general biology course enabled him to make a significant professional contribution at the University.¹⁵ When

14. John M. Coulter and Merle C. Coulter, *Where Evolution and Religion Meet* (New York, 1926).

15. Joseph Schwab later argued that Coulter had always stood in the shadow of his father, and his participation in the biology course offered him a way to compensate

Chauncey Boucher asked him to lead the planning effort to get the new sequence off the ground, Coulter eagerly agreed to do so.

Coulter organized a course that depended on the cooperation of a number of other senior biologists, each of whom agreed to give several lectures in the course. He was assisted in his lectures by a team of younger biologists, including Alfred E. Emerson and Ralph Buchsbaum from Zoology and Ralph W. Gerard from Physiology, several of whom would go on to distinguished scholarly careers in the Division of the Biological Sciences. Other senior members who were also invited to give lectures included Warder C. Allee, Fay Cooper-Cole, Lester R. Dragstedt, and Alfred S. Romer—with perhaps the most notable scholar being A. J. Carlson, popularly known as Ajax Carlson, a distinguished physiologist who gave fifteen lectures during the academic year and became one of the most beloved general education faculty teachers in the College before World War II.¹⁶ Born in Sweden, Carlson came to America at the age of sixteen in 1891 knowing not a word of English. He worked as a carpenter's apprentice and planned on becoming a Lutheran minister. But he soon became interested in physiology and ended up at Stanford, where he took a Ph.D. in 1902. In 1904 Harper hired him as an instructor at

for this situation: "He felt he should have been what his father had been, a research man. He kept up with the literature in the field, he read, he always had a rapport with the papers that were being printed and published and so on. . . . Anyway, he had a research ideal which he did not fulfill." Interview of Joseph J. Schwab with Christopher Kimball, April 7, 1987, pp. 59–60, *Oral History Program*.

16. Lester R. Dragstedt, "Anton Julius Carlson, January 29, 1875–September 2, 1956," *Biographical Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, 35 (1961): 1–32; and *idem*, "An American by Choice: A Story about Dr. A. J. Carlson," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 7 (1984): 145–158.

Chicago, and by 1914 he was a full professor of physiology. Carlson was legendary for asking his students in his heavy Swedish accent a formidable question: "What is the evidence?" That students were often befuddled and even terrified as to how to answer Carlson's questions seemed to make him all the more appealing as a lecturer. Joseph Schwab remembered him as someone who "took no nonsense, he didn't talk professorese, he was a toughie."¹⁷ Edwin P. Jordan, a former student who became the director of education at the Cleveland Clinic, recalled, "[I]n creating a state of mind of skepticism, coupled with a desire to learn more, but to do this only on the basis of the scientific method, you have surely had an enormous influence not only on those who were directly touched by your teaching and investigative methods but also on their students and their students' students as well."¹⁸ Merle Coulter later observed of Carlson's role in the biology general course, "You were usually our chief offensive threat and a tower of strength on defense."¹⁹ That a scholar of Carlson's stature was steadily devoted to the biology general education course as a matter of professional responsibility made its success all the easier. But Carlson's ferocious empiricism, and confident assaying of "the facts" of any intellectual problem was to become a subject of a campus-wide debate in 1934.

Merle Coulter was particularly proud that students would encounter "the most distinguished authority" in a specific field, thereby enabling the course to generate a "real 'University tone'" by giving first- and second-year students "contact with many of the most outstanding men on our

17. Interview of Joseph J. Schwab with Christopher Kimball, April 7, 1987, p. 34.

18. Jordan to Carlson, December 28, 1949, *Anton J. Carlson Papers*, Box 1.

19. Coulter to Carlson, January 29, 1950, *ibid.*

University faculty.”²⁰ In addition to the formal lectures, students participated in weekly discussion conferences and also had access to what Coulter called “laboratory exhibits.” Attendance at the latter was optional, but Coulter reported in 1935 that “most of the students of previous years have attended regularly and have found these exhibits to be one of the most interesting and valuable parts of the course.”²¹

Coulter’s group crafted their outline in considerable detail during the spring of 1931. The course was intended to help cultivate “the scientific attitude of mind” among students by exposing them to various examples of the application of scientific methods, to provide a level of basic knowledge of biology as would be needed by “a modern citizen,” and to encourage among students an interest in “the grand machinery of the organic world and in the major concepts of biology.” The course was divided into four major parts: a survey of the plant and animal kingdoms; an analysis of the dynamics of living organisms, including physiology and psychology; studies in evolution, heredity, and eugenics, and a section on ecology; and the relation of living organisms to their environment and to each other.²² The Autumn Quarter focused on giving the students an evolutionary portrait of the organic world, moving from the plant kingdom to invertebrates and vertebrates to the most complex animal, the

20. Merle Coulter, “Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences,” October 1941, p. 8, *Archive of the College*, Box 5, folder 8.

21. “General Introductory Course in Biological Science. Schedule of Conferences and Lectures, Autumn, 1935,” *ibid.*, Box 6, folder 9.

22. “The General Course in Biological Science,” [1931] *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.

human being. The Winter Quarter then focused directly on individual living organisms, with lectures on blood, heart, respiration, digestion, enzymes, kidneys, endocrine glands, the nervous system, nutrition, bacteria, and disease. The final part of the course related man to the world around him, using ecology and evolution as its central focus. Here the students heard lectures on evolution, heredity, mutation, selection, eugenics, and ecology. The course gained a strong coherence by its focus on the major concepts of evolution, structure, and function within the domain of biological phenomena. Its inductive and experimental approach and its frequent invocation of the physical and chemical basis of human life and of the chemical and physical knowledge required to understand such processes as photosynthesis, respiration, or the functioning of the nervous system afforded the course natural links to the material covered in the general course in the physical sciences. Coulter felt that it was especially valuable

to give the student an understanding of and a respect for the unbiased method of thinking that characterizes, or should characterize, workers in the field of natural science. . . . [W]e hoped to drill the student in such a manner to improve his ability to think scientifically and/or strengthen his habit of thinking in this way. Recognizing that other courses on our campus would be aiming at the same general objective, we felt it appropriate for our course to stress that particular tool of the scientific method which modern biology cherishes most highly—controlled experimentation.²³

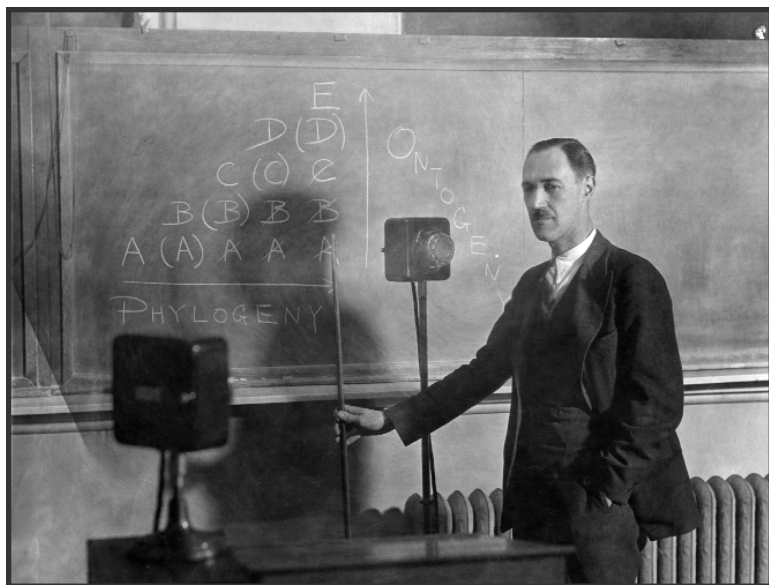
23. Coulter, "Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences," p. 2.

Coulter's emphasis on the virtues of the scientific method, as customary and conventional as it might seem to us today, was in fact a decision of great curricular import, for it set the New Plan in a skills-oriented direction that transcended the conveying of raw data and factual information. It confirmed the excitement and prestige of science in the interwar period.

The course used a range of review materials, quizzes, and papers to achieve these noble ends, although these were only advisory and not for credit. In addition to the lectures and discussion conferences, Coulter also organized each week an optional laboratory demonstration. Students were not permitted to handle specimens or equipment, so their role was to be one of an interested observer, not an active participant. Coulter actually believed that this was a more effective pedagogical approach since "[m]ore than once it has been remarked by adult visitors to some of our laboratory demonstrations that a half-hour of this type of thing is more valuable to the average student than a month of old-fashioned laboratory work." In 1934, Coulter estimated that between 60 and 70 percent of the students regularly attended the laboratory demonstrations.²⁴

Coulter and his colleagues also pioneered the production of a series of short motion pictures with ERPI Classroom Films that provided demonstrations of experiments on topics such as "The Heart and Circulation," "Mechanisms for Breathing," "Digestion of Foods," "The Work of the Kidneys," "The Endocrine Glands," "The Nervous System," and "Heredity." By 1940 eleven such films had been produced, and Coulter was proud that all of them were "good and some of them are remarkably good." The films were designed to appeal to more general audiences beyond university students, enabling viewers to see and understand complex

24. Statement by Merle Coulter, September 14, 1934, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.



Merle C. Coulter, undated.

biological processes “even more clearly than if they had been present in the laboratory.” Coulter also admitted that “for better or worse, most of our young American students like the movies and are stimulated to an increased interest in biology by an occasional movie presentation.”²⁵

Among College students the biology general course quickly became the most popular of the four general education courses, and its coherent organization, overarching themes, and logical rhythm certainly contributed to that state of affairs. But there was also the quiet certainty and confidence that the course was genuinely important for young students, not only as citizens but as inhabitants of a closely and intimately shared natural world.

25. Coulter, “Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences,” pp. 18–19.

Anton Carlson was particularly insistent that “[t]he understanding of the physical man himself and his environment, the adjustment to and the control of his environment cannot be foreign to genuine liberal education.”²⁶

The parallel course in the physical sciences was organized by Harvey B. Lemon, a physicist who completed his undergraduate studies at Chicago (B.A., 1906) and who had studied with Albert A. Michelson and Henry Gale at Chicago for the doctorate, completing a dissertation on spectroscopic studies of hydrogen in 1912. Lemon, who was interested in pedagogy, authored several articles in the 1920s on the use of intelligence tests to diagnose the capability of students to succeed in science courses.²⁷ Lemon was a scholar of wide-ranging interests with a flair for the dramatic. He was also deeply committed to improving the teaching of physics, and from 1937–39 he served as president of the American Association of Physics Teachers. He also exercised stringent standards in the hiring of course assistants, noting that if one specific graduate student did not conduct himself in a “thoroughly dignified and grown-up fashion,” he would “find himself demoted to the laboratory.”²⁸

Lemon was joined in the course by a distinguished chemist, Hermann Schlesinger, who had also received both his B.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Chicago, studying with Julius Stieglitz. Schlesinger, who joined the faculty in 1910 and was promoted to full professor in 1922,

26. Anton J. Carlson, “The Offerings and Facilities in the Natural Sciences in the Liberal Arts Colleges,” *The North Central Association Quarterly*, 18 (1943): 162.

27. Harvey B. Lemon, “Forecasting Failures in College Classes,” *The School Review*, 30 (1922): 382–387; *idem*, “Preliminary Intelligence Testing in the Department of Physics, University of Chicago,” *School Science and Mathematics*, 20 (1920): 226–231.

28. Lemon to Gale, June 6, 1936, *Papers of the Physics Department*, Box 9, folder 17.

eventually won the Priestly Medal of the American Chemical Society. Other distinguished scholars including Gilbert A. Bliss, Otto Struve, Arthur H. Compton, William Bartky, and J. Harlen Bretz gave lectures, thus giving young College students a chance to encounter prominent scholars from across the division.²⁹

The new course sought to integrate astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and geology into one yearlong survey. It started with the earth as an astronomical body, considering the structure of the universe, the nature of planets and stars and their evolutionary origins; it continued with a survey of essential components of the physical sciences, beginning with the fundamental laws of energy, heat, and temperature as manifestations of atomic and molecular motions, the nature of electricity, sound, light, and X rays as examples of the phenomena of waves; it then studied basic chemistry, chemical elements, compounds, mixtures, solutions, colloids, atomic weights and numbers, chemical transformations, the periodic system, chemical reactions, the atmosphere, ionization, and carbon compounds; and the course concluded with a study of the geological features of the earth, rocks, minerals, the formation of the mountains and oceans, climatic changes, and fossils as a geological record of life.

Both the biological sciences and physical sciences general courses were organized in lecture/discussion format, having three lectures plus one discussion each week. Both courses styled themselves as “state of the art” in scholarly terms, and both profited from that crescendo of self-confidence about the importance of the natural sciences to human life that enveloped American research universities after World War I. The war

29. A detailed history of the course is provided by Thornton W. Page, “The Two-Year Program. Physical Sciences,” November 1949, *PP*, 1946–1950, Box 12, folder 5.

had given American scientists powerful opportunities to demonstrate the practical impact of modern science, not only for human destruction but also for human regeneration and reconciliation. On our campus, for example, Julius Stieglitz, the chair of Chemistry, who participated in the development of “The Nature of the World and Man” course, was a bold and articulate spokesman for the view that chemistry was a crucial partner for modern medicine and modern pharmacology, and that “chemistry is the fundamental science of the transformation of matter, and the transformation of matter almost at will obviously has inherent in itself the realization of unlimited possibilities for good.”³⁰ Stieglitz was also a strong advocate of integrating the intellectual standards associated with advanced scientific research and graduate education into the undergraduate curriculum. He was convinced that the University of Chicago should

develop to the utmost its singular opportunity for the most inspiring type of college education, resulting from the co-existence in a single institution of great graduate departments and great colleges crowded with eager thousands—the red blood of universities. . . . Situated in the heart of the American nation, why should it hesitate to try the experiment of giving to its four years of college life every last ounce of benefit from the presence of its great graduate faculties and, reciprocally, of increasing the strength and research output of its graduate schools in the manning of its college chairs and thus develop to the utmost the *American university*.³¹

30. Julius Stieglitz, *Chemistry in the Service of Man* (Chicago, 1925), p. 9.

31. Julius Stieglitz, “The Past and the Present,” *University of Chicago Magazine*, March 1929, pp. 233–239, here p. 239.

Equally noteworthy was the greater sense of interdependence of various disciplines in the natural sciences and the need for close collaboration across the disciplines to attain pathbreaking conceptual and empirical discoveries. A proposal by Ezra J. Kraus of the Department of Botany in late 1927 to create an interdisciplinary Institute of Biology insisted that “[t]he [fundamental biological] problems, rather than the departments of the university should serve as points of attack. Thus the work of perhaps several men in various departments could be coordinated and focused on a problem.”³² Vice-President Frederic Woodward noted about Kraus that he was “a great believer in cooperative research,” and was “struck by the similarity of the situation in the biological and social sciences. He made a great impression on me and I think we should encourage him and back him up at every possible point.”³³ As a young physicist writing in the early 1920s, Harvey Lemon was equally confident that science was on the threshold of enormous changes that educated men and women must understand, if only to prevent the kind of misuse of science that had (to his mind) taken place between 1914 and 1918:

Clear heads and sober minds are needed, as never before, to watch lest the genie prove to be an evil one providing us with the weapons for our own destruction. The dreams of Jules Verne that fired the imagination of our boyhood, incredible as they then appeared, are today in many instances accomplished facts. . . . As individuals in social and political life, we must

32. Kraus to Max Mason, October 24, 1927, “Institute of Biology,” *PP* 1889–1925, Box 101, folder 1.

33. Woodward to Mason, August 29, 1927, *ibid.*

keep pace with science; and, taking the warning from the fate of [Henry] Moseley, prevent the repetition of another such orgy of destruction as that which recently was detonated by the monumental stupidity of our so-called civilization.³⁴

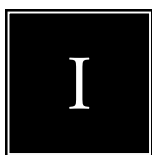
Lemon later insisted that science was not simply about generating ever more remarkable technical applications:

Applications of science have not been, and never will be, the chief motive of the scientific investigator or student. The study of pure science will never be abandoned as long as human beings are characterized by a certain element of curiosity with respect to their environment. . . . In our continuing efforts to a better and better understanding of things which perhaps we shall not fully understand for many centuries yet to come, if ever, we find the greatest interest and the most driving motive in the pursuit of scientific studies.³⁵

34. Harvey B. Lemon, "New Vistas of Atomic Structure," *The Scientific Monthly*, 17 (1923): 181.

35. Harvey B. Lemon and Niel F. Beardsley, *Experimental Mechanics. An Analytical College Text* (Chicago, 1935), p. 6.

THE HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
GENERAL COURSES



f the two natural sciences courses emerged from curricular projects of the 1920s, the new general humanities course had an even deeper institutional history. The main architect was an elderly history professor, Ferdinand Schevill, whose initial appointment to Chicago originated in 1892. Schevill had a fascinating career. Born in Cincinnati in 1868, Schevill attended Yale University as an undergraduate at the same time that William Rainey Harper was on the faculty. Schevill took Harper's course on the Hebrew prophets, establishing a personal relationship that eventually led to Schevill's coming to Chicago. After graduating from Yale he went to Germany to study for a Ph.D. in history, working at the University of Freiburg with, among others, Hermann von Holst. In 1892, Harper offered Schevill a job for \$800 as an "Assistant in History" on the recommendation of Charles F. Kent, a former student of Harper's at Yale who was studying Hebrew in Berlin and who reminded Harper that Schevill was one of the "brightest men" in the Yale graduating class of 1889.³⁶ Such informality was typical of the

36. Kent to Harper, October 1, 1891, *William Rainey Harper Papers*, Box 14, folder 30. Schevill's birth name was Schwill, which he anglicized in 1909. Urged by Kent, Schevill wrote to Harper on October 17, 1891, reintroducing himself and presenting his credentials. Schevill to Harper, October 17, 1891, *ibid.* Harper received a similar suggestion from George S. Goodspeed, who informed Harper of a recent meeting with Schevill and who allowed that "he . . . strikes me as a very bright man. I think if you could put him in as a docent at Chicago, you would not be mistaken at all." Goodspeed to Harper, October 25, 1891, *ibid.*, Box 12, folder 34.

times, and Schevill came to Chicago knowing little or nothing of the prehistory of the new University.

Ferdinand Schevill soon proved to be an amiable colleague and a brilliant teacher.³⁷ He was particularly close to a remarkable social circle of young humanists in the later 1890s who met regularly and included John Mathews Manly, Robert Herrick, Robert Lovett, and William Vaughn Moody, a reminder of how dependent the early faculty were on each other for intellectual and cultural sustenance.³⁸ Schevill never liked the University as a administrative community, and when he warned his personal friend Frank Lloyd Wright that the University's high school was like "all schools, established churches, minister-blest marriages, and all other sacred institutions" in that "[t]o play with any one of them is alas! alas! to toss yourself into a buzz-saw," he was alluding to his own iconoclastic relationship with Chicago.³⁹

37. The distinguished American historian Howard K. Beale of the University of Wisconsin many years later remembered that Schevill "was the greatest teacher I had ever sat under. He was, of course, one of the most cultivated persons and delightful companions I have ever known. Above all else he was a great human being. I still feel the inspiration he gave me when I took his courses as an undergraduate." Beale to James L. Cate, December 31, 1956, *James L. Cate Papers*, Box 4.

38. Robert M. Lovett, *All Our Years. The Autobiography of Robert Morss Lovett* (New York, 1948), pp. 97–98. Robert Herrick later remembered, "The half dozen of us young men who had come to the new world together naturally formed the closest sort of fellowship. We were like a company of the celebrated musketeers, disturbers of the academic peace and scoffers often, but really devoted to our work and faithful. We may have cast regretful glances half of homesickness backward to that pleasant East from which we came, but we were faithful to the hope of the West." "Going West," pp. 6–7, *Robert Herrick Papers*, Box 3, folder 10.

39. Schevill to Wright, September 4, 1916, *Frank Lloyd Wright Papers*, microfiche copy at the Getty Research Institute.

Schevill began his scholarly career with studies of the medieval Italian communes. His first major book was a study of the free republic of Siena in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and it highlighted a major theme in Schevill's thought: the tension between the universal and the particular, between monarchy which represented order and civility, and communal self-government which sponsored freedom and democracy. Schevill believed that free communes like Siena had "endowed man with a new conception of his powers and purposes." They created "a new civilization, a civilization, in fact, with the elaboration of which the world had been occupied down to our own day."⁴⁰ A similar conceptual framework informed Schevill's later book on the Renaissance city-state of Florence, published in 1936. Schevill would later argue that both of these impulses—order and freedom—were already present in the ancient world, and that it was thus logical to begin the study of European civilization with Greece and Rome.⁴¹ Of the many members of the early Chicago faculty who had studied in Europe, Ferdinand Schevill was perhaps the one most transformed by European values and European culture. He once confessed to his friend Sherwood Anderson, "In America I often have the feeling that I belong to Europe, and in Europe I reach the deep conclusion

40. Ferdinand Schevill, *Siena. The Story of a Medieval Commune* (New York, 1909), pp. 420–421.

41. "The outstanding forms evolved by the Mediterranean peoples are two: monarchy and the self-governing city-state. Monarchy represents the tendency toward unity and peace; the city-state the tendency towards freedom and self-determination. The balance between unity and freedom is indicated as the political problem of mankind." Schevill to Baker Brownell, November 26, 1924, *Baker Brownell Papers*, Box 9, folder 4, Northwestern University Archives. See also Ferdinand Schevill, "Man's Political History," in Baker Brownell, ed., *Man and His World. Northwestern University Essays in Contemporary Thought*. Volume 4. *Making Mankind* (New York, 1929), pp. 145–176.

that my roots are in American soil."⁴² He traveled frequently across Europe, gaining an intimate, firsthand knowledge of European art and architecture and often taking friends and the children of colleagues on cycling and walking tours of France, Germany, and his beloved Italy.⁴³

Schevill was one of a small minority of faculty who opposed America's entrance into World War I, further isolating him from the mainline faculty politics of Chicago, and by the early 1920s he had tired of teaching, indicating to President Ernest D. Burton in 1923 that he intended to resign to pursue a full-time career in writing.⁴⁴ Burton persuaded Schevill to stay on a part-time basis until 1927, when he left the University for good, or so he thought. Schevill had looked forward to a life beyond the institutional claims of the University, but by 1930 he was almost broke, having loaned substantial sums to friends who were in distress because of the Depression, and part of his motivation to return to teaching may have been financial urgency.⁴⁵ When Boucher contacted him in early 1931 about returning to the University to take up the great challenge of the new humanities course, Schevill was thus easily persuaded both by the substantial salary that Boucher offered him and by the challenge to

42. Schevill to Sherwood Anderson, written while Schevill was visiting Vienna, November 13, 1927, *Sherwood Anderson Papers*, Box 27, Newberry Library.

43. See, for example, Lovett, *All Our Years*, pp. 71–89, 106–120; William Vaughn Moody, "European Diary," pp. 28–33, *William Vaughn Moody Papers*, Box 1, folder 9. The Chicago sociologist Everett C. Hughes later remembered that Schevill took the son of W. I. Thomas on a walking tour of Italy. Hughes to Mary Bolton Wirth, May 31, 1968, *Mary Bolton Wirth Papers*, Box 5, folder 1.

44. Schevill to Burton, December 27, 1923, *PP, 1889–1925*, Box 59, folder 21.

45. Schevill to Frank Lloyd Wright, October 19, 1930, *Frank Lloyd Wright Papers*. Schevill also faced heavy medical bills arising from his wife's illness.

finally leave his mark on the teaching of European civilization to newly minted college students.⁴⁶

World War I came as a deep shock to Ferdinand Schevill, who believed that it had threatened the fundamental values of cultural balance and material progress that had marked European civilization up to 1914. The world of the 1920s was one dominated by “revolutionary monstrosities” in Europe and “heaped-up wealth” in America.⁴⁷ For a bourgeois humanist rooted in the culture of late nineteenth-century Central Europe, both continents seemed to be veering off course, into crass materialism and social upheaval. Schevill argued in 1927 to Frank Lloyd Wright that “[o]urs is a government by the mob,” and by 1932 he would insist that

[t]he more I turn the present difficulties over in my mind, the more convinced I am the issue is quite simply between two kinds of society. Either the acquisitive society we’ve got or a friendly commonwealth of approximate economic equals. Maybe the acquisitive society is all we are capable of with our inheritance and animal equipment. In that case we shall continue to struggle in the back slough in which the human race has been immersed from the beginning. But if we are to make a try for the other thing—and I say, let’s go—we ought to be perfectly clear that it is a whole-hog or nothing proposition and

46. Boucher to Filbey and Woodward, March 13, 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2. Schevill was offered an annual salary of \$7,500, a very substantial sum for the time.

47. Schevill to Anderson, September 22, 1923, and November 13, 1927, *Sherwood Anderson Papers*, Box 27.

that pacifism, third-parties and melioratives are distractions that darken the issue.⁴⁸

Schevill was a prolific writer, espousing the nineteenth-century European tradition of writing history for the educated general reader. He once argued,

I kept in mind a prospective audience, composed, not of a small group of specialists, but of that larger body of men and women who constitute a spiritual brotherhood by reason of their common interest in the treasure of the past. . . . I . . . make bold to affirm my belief that scholarship practiced as the secret cult of a few initiates, amidst the jealous and watchful exclusion of the public, may indeed succeed in preserving its principles from contamination, but must pay for the immunity obtained with the failure of the social and educational purposes which are its noblest justification.⁴⁹

Schevill thus believed that history's largest purpose was to ennoble as well as to educate the general reader, and in his teaching at the University of Chicago he pursued the same objectives, making him an ideal and much cherished teacher who sought to encourage the student's cultural self-development and intellectual maturity. In a sense, Schevill was deeply involved in the project of general education long before the phrase became a popular educational concept in the 1930s and 1940s.

48. Schevill to Wright, February 16, 1927, *Frank Lloyd Wright Papers*; Schevill to Anderson, September 26, 1932, *Sherwood Anderson Papers*, Box 27.

49. Schevill, *Siena*, p. v.

Schevill's most successful book was his *History of Modern Europe*, first published in 1898 and revised continuously until 1946. The 1925 edition reveals many of the arguments that would have informed his approach to teaching European history. Schevill believed that Europe had over a thousand years nurtured a European civilization that was perhaps the most powerful and far-reaching of world civilizations, since it included the United States within its cultural and intellectual compass. The United States was a "passionate, struggling, and inseparable element" of a larger European civilization, and this gave special urgency and authority to the project of teaching European history to young Americans.⁵⁰ Yet after World War I, a war that he profoundly regretted, Ferdinand Schevill's story of a slow but positive evolution of European civilization was vastly complicated by the ruptures of the Peace of Versailles. By the later 1920s, he was in the fascinating but also perplexing situation of having to imagine the portrait of a Europe that he viewed with both admiration and disillusionment, which could be proffered to young Americans. In the end, the course that he designed was much more of the first than the second, having little to do with a twentieth century that Schevill found dispiriting and depressing.

Schevill was assisted by Arthur P. Scott, then a mid-career associate professor in History who was a departmental jack-of-all-trades, and (to a much lesser extent) by Hayward Keniston, an associate professor of Spanish philology and comparative linguistics who eventually left Chicago for the University of Michigan. A graduate of Princeton, Scott had received his Ph.D. from Chicago in 1916. Scott had lived for several years in Beirut and had a special interest in the expansion of Europe. He

50. Ferdinand Schevill, *A History of Europe from the Reformation to Our Own Day* (New York, 1925), p. 4.

was also an authority on colonial American law who had published a book on criminal law in colonial Virginia, and he regularly taught courses on United States history as well. In the 1920s, he taught an introductory survey in the Department of History on the “History of European Civilization,” based on a strict chronological framework. The new humanities general education survey was a collaborative effort, but Ferdinand Schevill provided the major intellectual imprint on its formation.⁵¹ Arthur Scott later recalled that “[w]e used to say that whatever the course did for the students, it certainly educated the staff; and no small element in our education was the intimate and informal contacts with the leader whom we usually addressed as Maestro, and referred to as the Old Master.”⁵² When Schevill died in 1954, Norman Maclean remembered of the founding of the course in 1931 that “[i]n the history of our university, this moment itself was a Renaissance and the atmosphere was charged with excitement, defiance, and promise of adventure.” For Maclean, Schevill’s humanism lay at the heart of the course, a humanism that was itself

a form of art. He was a historian of man’s creative activity, and so the Renaissance was his home and Florence was his city. By this, I mean something more than that he loved architecture, painting, sculpture, literature, and music. I mean that he viewed man’s other activities—economic and political and social—as themselves manifestations of the creative spirit

51. See Schevill to Boucher, April 23, 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

52. Arthur Scott, eulogy for Ferdinand Schevill, 1955, *Cate Papers*, Box 4; and C. Phillip Miller to James L. Cate, March 9, 1955, *ibid.*

which when fully flourishing as in Florence, is dominated by a desire to attain beauty.⁵³

Schevill, Scott, and Keniston fashioned a course that wove together strands of other courses they had taught in the 1910s and 1920s.⁵⁴ The purpose of the course was to expose students to “the cultural history of mankind as a continuum and as a whole.”⁵⁵ Although colleagues in the social sciences later tagged the course as being primarily “aesthetic” and neglecting political and social history, this was not quite true. Framing lectures did provide key chronology, but much of the course was on the history of European ideas, as represented by significant writers and thinkers. Students were expected to read substantial parts of classics like (among many others) the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Herodotus, Thucydides, the Bible, Dante, Chaucer, Molière, Luther, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Rousseau, Goethe, Darwin, and Walt Whitman. Many individual poems and other shorter pieces were also assigned. The aim of the course was to use “history as a foundation and framework for the presentation of the religion, philosophy, literature and art of the civilizations which have contributed most conspicuously to the shaping of the contemporary outlook on life,”

53. Norman Maclean, eulogy for Ferdinand Schevill, 1955, *ibid.*

54. It might be argued that Boucher privileged his own department in giving the historians the primary charge of organizing the humanities general course. The department had adopted a resolution in early 1931 urging Boucher “to retain the course on the History of Civilization as part of the offering of either the Humanities or the Social Sciences Division or both.” Boucher’s decision to appoint Schevill did essentially that. “Minutes of the Department of History, January 24, 1931,” *Department of History Records*, Box 19, folder 4.

55. “Preliminary Report of the Committee in Charge of the General Courses in the Humanities,” April 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

beginning with the civilizations of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates valleys, Greece and Rome, and concluding with “our ruling western civilization,” the latter being “the main object of attention.”⁵⁶ Intellectually, it was clearly the most conservative of the four new general courses, since it did not seek to break new ground in pedagogical methods or in scholarly design. The logic of the course was to convey the rich tapestry of the European tradition, a tradition that had experienced profound rupture between 1914 and 1918. The course dealt with World War I and its aftermath in only two lectures, perhaps because Schevill himself was so disillusioned by it.⁵⁷

Although the history of Western civilization from the ancient world to contemporary times became the organizing axis, much attention was also paid to European literature, art, and architecture. American literature was also included, both from a sense of time and place, but also in a bow to Schevill’s notion that America was also a part of Western civilization. The works of art examined in the course were treated in a strongly contextualist mode, or as a later commentary noted “that ideas and works of art are related to the *life* out of which they arise.”⁵⁸ The course was an

56. Schevill, *ibid.*

57. In fact, the initial outline proposed in April 1931, had nothing on the twentieth century aside from a final lecture, “This Plural World: The Reigning Confusion in Our Intellectual and Aesthetic Outlook.” The first syllabus published in September 1931 commented, “The modern world of science and machines, of national states and world empires, has set in motion forces which seem to have got out of hand and threaten, like Frankenstein’s monster, to destroy the civilization which gave rise to them.” *Introductory General Course in the Humanities Syllabus* (Chicago, 1931), p. 328.

58. Arthur P. Scott, “The Humanities General Course. Statement of Objectives,” May 1939, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.

obvious target for formalists who cared little or nothing about the encrusted historical exemplariness of their texts and more about the intrinsic structural properties that defined them as works of art. Still, the course styled itself as closely attentive to the development of analytic skills and aesthetic judgment. As Arthur Scott put it in 1933, the humanities course aimed to convey a certain amount of information about European culture that would be of “practical value to young people presently to be adult members of twentieth century American society.” But it also sought, “to the limits of its collective ingenuity,” to encourage and to give practice to “straight and independent habits of thinking, as by-products of which it may fondly be hoped that a more critical, rational, tolerant, and broad-minded attitude may be fostered.”⁵⁹

To operationalize the course Schevill needed young assistants, and he found three dedicated men in Norman Maclean, Eugene N. Anderson, and James L. Cate. Cate, a young medievalist from Texas, and Anderson, a young German historian from Colorado, had studied with Schevill and Scott and were hired first. Cate in turn told Schevill and Scott about Norman Maclean and persuaded them to hire his fellow westerner from Montana, who was a graduate student in the Department of English. The chance to join what he viewed at the time as a truly revolutionary teaching project was a decisive moment for Maclean. Chauncey Boucher later described Maclean’s work in the humanities general course as the product of a “choice soul and a teaching genius. . . . His hold upon students is most remarkable.”⁶⁰ Many years later Maclean wrote to Frances

59. Scott to Boucher, November 1, 1933, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

60. Boucher’s evaluation, dated 1935, is in *PP 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 42, folder 8.

Cate, Jimmie Cate's widow, remembering that Schevill and Scott had looked for "young men who like them were warm-hearted, humorous, and wide-ranging in their interests" and that the chance to teach in the new humanities course between 1931 and 1937 had offered "the happiest and most exciting years of our lives."⁶¹

The course consisted of ninety lectures of fifty minutes each over three quarters, with one discussion session a week for twenty-five students that focused on an intensive discussion of an assigned original document or documents. Schevill and Scott gave most of the lectures, but they also recruited other luminaries from the humanities—like Paul Shorey, T. V. Smith, James W. Thompson, William Craigie, Shailer Mathews, and Robert Lovett—to offer single lectures on subjects close to their research competency. The lectures were organized linearly along a chronological trajectory, and combined narrative social and political history with studies of novels and works of art. At first several fragments of texts were discussed each week, but by the mid-1930s the course had settled into a pattern of assigning one notable work—a novel, a poem, or a piece of nonfiction—each week for discussion, thirty in all through the academic year. The lectures did not duplicate the reading assignments, but were meant as introductions to broad debates or as portraits of a *Weltanschauung* of an historical era. The course was replete with facts and dates, but also had a more ambitious agenda in that it hoped to encourage analytic study skills and intellectual self-confidence among

61. "Remember . . . all the excitement of those days of the new Hutchins College, and the wonderful warm times we had when our staff was invited to Bookswallow." Maclean to Frances Cate, November 6, 1981, *Norman Maclean Papers*, Box 15. I am very grateful to Jean Maclean Snyder and John N. Maclean for permission to use their father's papers.

its students.⁶² Much of this happened outside of class, in small groups run by Cate, Maclean, and others. Bill McNeill, who was a student in Maclean's discussion group of the humanities course in 1934–35, later recalled the scene in Maclean's office where

you [Maclean] used to assemble a group of eager beavers to talk about anything and everything. The kernel of this group later migrated to the Beta house and became the protagonists of the marathon bull sessions on whose margins I wafted through college. You, of course, were the catalyst, and thereby created the micro-environment of my college days, an environment which still seems so marvelous to me that I cannot really believe that others since have ever attained such heights as we, foolish and sophomoric as we must have been, then scaled.⁶³

The humanities course was in some respects as self-consciously skills-oriented as was its latter-day heir, the classic "History of Western Civilization" course of the 1950s, but it did insist that European civilization itself bore within it the fate of modern man, and that in studying this fate, American university students would come to appreciate and analyze their own situations more acutely and self-consciously.

62. Maclean remembered about James Cate's discussion groups that "Jimmie really ran discussion groups. They were really 'question hours'. Jimmie pursued his students with shrewd, unrelenting questions until he caught them with the answer, and 'I don't know' was never an answer to him. To him, you always knew the answer, if you only knew how to find it. And I feel that his greatest professional joy was in teaching and seeing his students discovering with joy that they really knew the answer." *Ibid.*

63. McNeill to Maclean, January 29, 1966, *Maclean Papers*, Box 18.

The yearlong social sciences course for first-year students, "Social Sciences I," was organized by three young professors, Harry Gideonse, Jerome Kerwin, and Louis Wirth. Each of these men represented a different discipline, each was to become an authority in his field, and each had clear personal connections to the "real" world of social sciences praxis that began to define the conduct of general education in the 1930s.⁶⁴ An economist, Harry D. Gideonse served as the chair of the course and was its most articulate spokesman.⁶⁵ Born in the Netherlands and trained in chemistry and economics at Columbia University and the University of Geneva, Gideonse wrote his doctoral dissertation on the war debts generated by World War I. He worked for an international student organization in Geneva for several years, was fluent in French and German, and had strong credentials in international relations and international trade. Gideonse was hired by the Department of Economics from Rutgers University as an untenured associate professor in

64. "Perhaps the most important result of the association of the graduate and professional schools with the college is the influence of research upon the general educational process. . . . There is an increasing disposition on the part of students to seek the classrooms of teachers who are known by their criticism of society to be realistic and fearless. . . . Research will replace tradition and authority in determining the beliefs by which men live." See Robert M. Lovett, "The Cleavage between College and Life," pp. 6–7, *Robert M. Lovett Papers*, Box 2, folder 17.

65. Boucher first appointed Gideonse to lead the course, who then recruited Wirth and Kerwin to join him. See "The General Course for Freshmen in the Social Sciences, April, 1931," *Archive of the College*, Box 15, folder 3. Gideonse, Wirth, and Kerwin also organized a second yearlong course in the social sciences for students wishing to major in one of the social sciences disciplines, but since this course was not required of all New Plan students, my discussion in the present essay will focus on the Introductory Course.

1930, with the expectation that he would be tenured within three years.⁶⁶ Gideonse was an acerbic, scrappy person, with an outgoing personality and quick wit who sometimes came across as being overly cocky and even vain.⁶⁷ He was a very effective public intellectual and participated regularly for seven years in the University of Chicago Round Table radio program, speaking out on public policy issues relating to domestic and international affairs. Charles Merriam characterized Gideonse as an excellent lecturer, but also as an “indoctrinator,” and Merriam did not mean this in a wholly flattering way.⁶⁸ As we will see below, Gideonse soon found himself on a collision course with Robert Hutchins over the meaning of general education, since he violently opposed Hutchins’s attempts to impose what Gideonse felt to be a backward-oriented, “Great Books” program at Chicago. In 1938, Gideonse was offered a tenured full professorship at Barnard College, which Hutchins refused to match, thereby forcing Gideonse out of the University. Gideonse soon left Barnard to become the second president of Brooklyn College, where he served with distinction until 1966 but amid some controversy over his staunch opposition to left-wing radicalism in the New York City unions.

Jerome G. Kerwin received his Ph.D. in political philosophy at Columbia University in 1926. In 1923, Charles Merriam recruited him

66. “If at the end of the period indicated [i.e., 1933] the relationship was mutually satisfactory, we should expect your tenure to become indeterminate.” H. A. Millis to Gideonse, February 6, 1930, *PP, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 25, folder 5.

67. “Gideonse is very able and nice, but something of a ‘blowhard’.” *William T. Hutchinson Diary*, entry of January 19, 1936.

68. “Minutes of the Sub-Committee on Curriculum, February 4, 1935,” p. 6, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 16.

to join the faculty of the Department of Political Science at Chicago as an instructor. Kerwin quickly became a protégé of Merriam, with Merriam personally introducing him to the vagaries of Chicago municipal politics. Kerwin immediately became engaged in local reform activities, like investigating illegal polling practices in “Hinky Dink” Kenna’s First Ward during the 1924 mayoral elections in Chicago. Throughout his career Kerwin encouraged his students to become involved in local politics, and he took pride that his former students as diverse as Leon Despres, Charles Percy, and Robert Merriam had followed his lead. Kerwin devoted much of his career to exploring the complex issues of church and state in American political culture, but he also wrote important books on schools and city government, on federal water-power legislation, on civil-military relationships in American life, and on the idea of democracy. A devout Catholic, Kerwin helped to found the local Roman Catholic Calvert House in 1953. Kerwin immediately proved himself an immensely popular undergraduate teacher (when he considered leaving Chicago for Dartmouth in 1928, six hundred students signed a petition urging him to stay), so it was hardly surprising that Boucher recruited him to the team charged with organizing the new course. Of his collaboration with Gideonse and Wirth, Kerwin later recalled that “[a]s we were from three different disciplines, it took three or four months for us to understand each other.” Given the enormous intellectual range that the new social sciences course sought to cover, Kerwin found the course to be “the hardest job of teaching I ever attempted.”⁶⁹

Louis Wirth was the most distinguished scholar of the group. Born to a Jewish farming family in Gmünden, a small Rhenish town in Germany, Wirth was sent in 1911 to live with an uncle in Omaha, Nebraska. He

69. *Maroon*, November 18, 1960, p. 20.

decided to remain in America, attended the College of the University of Chicago between 1916 and 1919, and stayed on to take his Ph.D. in Sociology. His teachers in graduate school were the great sociologists Albion Small, Robert Park, Ellsworth Faris, and William Burgess. But as an undergraduate, Wirth studied history as well as sociology and took eight courses in modern European history and modern American history. Wirth was one of a small group of leftists on campus during World War I, and he made his presence so widely known that he ran afoul of the University administration in 1919. Wirth was a leader of the Cosmopolitan Club, a group of international students. He was also a student radical who opposed American intervention in World War I. In the weeks before graduation in June 1919, Wirth gave a speech at a meeting of the Cosmopolitan Club denouncing the Treaty of Versailles as “the most impudent document ever devised by the hands and brains of diplomats.”⁷⁰ Fred Merrifield, an assistant professor in New Testament studies and the faculty adviser to the Cosmopolitan Club, reported to President Harry Pratt Judson on Wirth’s sentiments, accusing him of being a “clever orator, cool, and daring” who opposed “all established governments” and was “in favor of revolution.”⁷¹ Judson thereupon took the astonishing step of

70. *Chicago Tribune*, June 7, 1919, p. 3.

71. See the memorandum in the *PP, 1889–1925*, Box 69, folder 3; and the unsigned statement, written after May 14, 1919, in the *Ernest Burgess Papers*, Box 6, folder 11, reporting that “[t]here was in existence among certain members of the Club of a disposition to conduct the affairs of the Club House in accordance with Bolshevistic or anarchistic principles. This manifested itself in expressions of opposition to University regulations, and in declarations of intention to observe only those which were approved by the individual.” Fred Merrifield then had a direct collision with Louis Wirth at a meeting of the Cosmopolitan Club three days after Judson had attempted to have him expelled. Merrifield

summoning an emergency meeting of the full professors of the arts and sciences to consider withholding the granting of A.B. degrees to Wirth and Ephraim Gottlieb, another student radical, which would have been legally tantamount to expulsion.⁷² Judson clearly wanted Wirth to be evicted, but Ferdinand Schevill and Albion Small made a point of attending the meeting and spoke out strongly in Wirth's defense.⁷³ As

reported to Judson that Wirth had accused him of insulting students who were Jewish, that Wirth "cast slurs on my divinity (religious) work, insinuating that this work was carried on insincerely" and also that Wirth "drew out a petition, signed by numerous members, some signatures taken in my very presence with most insulting looks cast my way, to throw me out of the club." Fred Merrifield, "Insulting Remarks Addressed to Faculty Members at the Recent Cosmopolitan Meeting, Sunday, June 8th [1919]," *PP, 1889–1925*, Box 31, folder 8. Merrifield was himself a graduate of the University and the Divinity School. He had spent several years in Japan and had the claim to fame of having introduced baseball to the Japanese. As a scholar, he was not particularly distinguished.

72. "Minutes of the Faculty of the Arts, Literature, and Science, Special Meeting, June 5, 1919," p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, June 7, 1919, p. 3.

73. See the later memoir of Mary Bolton Wirth, "1916–1920 at the University of Chicago," p. 2. Mary Wirth, who was also an undergraduate at Chicago during the war, described in graphic detail the stolid campus political atmosphere presided over by President Harry Pratt Judson. She insisted that Ferdinand Schevill and his wife had used their home to provide bond money for a local radical student arrested in late 1919 and early 1920 in the so-called "post-Palmer raids": Professor and Mrs. Schevill "put up their home as bond and the case was continued for nearly eight years during which time this student—considered the most 'dangerous' of our days—had become a successful and conservative businessman in the State of Missouri. The Schevills were in a position for years where they could not sell their home because of the bond." *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4. Schevill sold the house to Everett C. Hughes in 1944, who later recalled that Schevill stopped by several times just to see the place again. Hughes to Mary Wirth, May 31, 1968. Both documents are in the *Mary Bolton Wirth Papers*, Box 5, folders 1 and 2.

a college student, Wirth had taken three history courses with Schevill, including Schevill's two-quarter graduate course, "History of Civilization," for which Wirth merited A's.⁷⁴ As profoundly different as these two men were—the one a young German Jew who had become a left-wing radical during his three years on campus and was accused by Merrifield of being a Bolshevik, the other a middle-aged German American whose life and career had made him into a kind of late nineteenth-century German *Bildungsbürger* deeply in love with Italian culture but fated to live his life in the American Midwest—both were opposed to the war, and both were shocked by the social inequalities it summoned forth and by its flawed diplomatic resolution in 1919.⁷⁵ The assembled faculty had the good sense to reject Judson's ploy. As Robert Lovett, another disillusioned senior faculty member who had lost a son in the war, later recalled, the "two students, about to graduate, made caustic criticisms of the Treaty of Versailles at a dinner of the International Club, which were reported by faculty spies. The President summoned the faculty to consider the question of withholding their degrees, and was unanimously told that if approval of the Treaty [of

74. Schevill himself considered that this course was a prototype of the history he intended to write in the mid and later 1920s. In his letter of resignation to Ernest D. Burton, Schevill observed that "[m]y courses in the History of Civilization may give you a general idea of the kind of thing which has taken possession of me and which I wish to bring to some sort of conclusion before the Referee calls Time and it is too late." Schevill to Burton, December 27, 1923, *PP*, 1889–1925, Box 59, folder 21.

75. Schevill's deep unhappiness with the Treaty of Versailles is clear in the 1925 edition of his *A History of Europe*: "[T]he new boundaries were drawn by a group of victors with the conscious purpose of doing the vanquished as much injury as possible" (p. 696).

Versailles] was to be a requirement for a degree, it should be so stated in the entrance requirements.”⁷⁶

By the early 1930s, Wirth was on his way to becoming one of the most important urban sociologists of his generation, but his notions about how to teach social sciences to beginning undergraduates were profoundly affected by his personal interest in large cities like Chicago.⁷⁷ Having worked for the Jewish Charities of Chicago helping immigrant families in the early 1920s, Wirth had a deep interest in translating social theory into social action. After rejoining the faculty as an assistant professor in 1931, he became involved in a myriad of municipal reform activities, serving as president of the American Council on Race Relations, as the director of planning for the Illinois Planning Commission, and as an adviser to many local community and business groups in Chicago. He was courageous enough to call for an end to the terrible real estate covenants that blocked African Americans in Chicago from moving into Hyde Park and Woodlawn.

One of the main intellectual goals of the new social sciences course was to help students understand the complexities of urban industrial civilization, and it could do this so effectively because its students lived and worked in the vast social laboratory that Chicago represented. Given the strong interest of Jerome Kerwin and Louis Wirth in using Chicago

76. Robert M. Lovett, “Democracy in Colleges,” p. 6, unpublished and undated manuscript, *Robert Lovett Papers*, Box 2, folder 17.

77. “Mary and Louis Wirth were young radicals and social workers together; Louis spent a day or two in jail at the time of the Palmer raids (1920).” Everett Hughes to Winifred Raushenbush, June 24, 1966, *Robert Park Papers*, Box 19, folder 6. For Wirth as a teacher, see Edward Shils, *A Fragment of a Sociological Autobiography. The History of My Pursuit of a Few Ideas* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2006), pp. 44–46. I owe this reference to Terry N. Clark.

as a social laboratory for their teaching, it was not surprising that the course even arranged for students to visit the Stock Exchange, the Board of Trade, Armour and Company, and the International Harvester Company, as well as unemployment offices, slums, and housing projects.⁷⁸ In addition to these formal visits, which were carefully planned to illustrate lecture or discussion topics in the course, the organizers also staged smaller events away from campus, including a group of fifty students at Druce Lake, who heard the young Reinhold Niebuhr discuss the (in his view) deeply flawed nature of American capitalism. Not surprisingly, Harry Gideonse sharply opposed this view, and the students found themselves in a two-day donnybrook that left them better informed about both positions. Another group of students organized a two-day retreat on international relations at Lakeside, Michigan, which discussed (among other topics) whether the United States should belatedly join the League of Nations. One of the social sciences course's discussion leaders, Mary Gilson, observed of the latter event that

[a]t this conference as well as the Druce Lake Conference the New Plan students stood head and shoulders above the others. This was so noticeable in relation to both their grasp of the subjects discussed and their phrasing of questions that one of the old plan students said to me "We old plan students are at a disadvantage at these conferences for you can see what a difference the New Plan training has made when you hear the freshmen and sophomores in discussion".⁷⁹

78. Gilson to Boucher, May 11, 1933, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

79. Gilson to Boucher, May 11, 1933, *ibid.*



Louis Wirth, photo by LIFE Magazine, 1945.

Such visits and symposia also helped to modulate the heavy emphasis on text-based readings, and as Walter Laves later observed, “This promises to become one of the richest aspects of the course to the students and is really only possible on a systematic basis when the staff and student body are sufficiently large—as in our present College course—to warrant a thoroughgoing effort.”⁸⁰

The social sciences course did not attempt to give a panoramic overview of the social sciences, since Gideonse, Kerwin, and Wirth felt that this was conceptually impossible. Rather the course focused on three

80. Walter H. Laves, “Report on the First Year of the Introductory Course in the Social Sciences,” pp. 12–13, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

large problems and approached them with the theoretical apparatus of three different disciplines, which they believed would be vastly superior to existing introductory courses that “must everywhere, for obvious reasons, be superficial and unsatisfactory.”⁸¹ The main theme of the new course was the “impact of the complex of forces that is generally described as the industrial revolution on economic, social, and political institutions.”⁸² The first quarter, taught by Gideonse, stressed the role of industrial change in England and in contemporary America, where students were asked to read R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism*, and Norman Thomas, *America's Way Out* in order to explore the development and general characteristics of the present economic order. The second quarter, taught by Wirth, took up questions of the impact of scientific and technological progress on modern society, studying population movements from rural to urban areas, the ways in which the new industrial-technological order had accelerated large-scale social change in the growth of large cities, and the emergence of new kinds of “culture” in place of societies with strong notions of customary traditions. This quarter used books such as W. G. Sumner's *Folkways*, Franz Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man*, and the classic work by Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*. The final quarter, taught by Kerwin, focused on the modern state—and especially central government—as a premier locus of political and economic control, with students exploring the growth of governmental authority and bureaucratic

81. See Gideonse, Wirth, and Kerwin to the social sciences faculty, May 15, 1931, p. 1, *ibid.*

82. “The General Course (for Freshmen) in the Social Sciences,” April 1931, *ibid.*

control in the industrial world.⁸³ In this quarter, students read Charles A. Beard, *American Government and Politics*; Harold Laski, *Politics*; Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*; and Gilbert Murray, *The Ordeal of This Generation*. The course ended with six lectures offered by Gideonse that tied the various themes together. In addition to these books, students were also asked to read essays by (among others) Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, T. R. Malthus, Thomas Paine, Ruth Benedict, Charles Beard, Charles H. Cooley, Robert E. Park, William F. Ogburn, Edward Sapir, and John Dewey—a veritable who's who of modern social and political thought.

Seen three-quarters of a century later, the social sciences general course looks like an enterprise invented in the midst of the vast displacements of the Great Depression, with both teachers and students alike confronting the collapse or near collapse of liberal societies in Europe and America. Ostensibly about the origins and development of industrial society, the course raised profound issues about the fate of individualism and personal freedom in face of the challenges that communism and fascism presented to European liberalism and American democracy. In seeking to analyze how the West became enveloped in the industrial world of the nineteenth century, the course also weighed America's and Europe's common but perilous future in the twentieth century, concluding with lectures on the rise of international cooperation and the options for the future determination of peace. The course's very lack of a single overarching theme or interpretative standpoint was quite deliberate. Intellectual pluralism, within a schema broadly sympathetic to industrial capitalism, would contrast with the mistaken hopes of

83. See Gidesonse's testimony about the course during the Walgreen investigation, May 24, 1935, *Laird Bell Papers*, Box 8, folder 8.

utopians, whether on the left or the right. In an inadvertent claim that revealed much about the course, Gideonse would later insist, “A course that pulled *everything* together quite systematically would not be true to life, and could only exist on the basis of some totalitarian philosophy of the Marxist, Thomist, or Fascist type.”⁸⁴ The reference to Thomism as a “totalitarian philosophy” was for local consumption in Hyde Park, and we will return to this invocation shortly.

The social sciences course prided itself on having lectures that were not repetitions of material from the syllabi, which resulted in more students attending than might otherwise have been the case and thereby encouraged “the greatest stimulation of original thinking and interest.” In contrast to the other courses that relied on visiting instructors who were often men of great prestige, the social sciences course had the advantage of allowing the students to get to know the ideas and personality of one person for a “long period of systematic attention.” Although discussion sections were voluntary, as late as 1940 Walter Laves estimated that at least two-thirds of the 750 students enrolled in the course faithfully participated in these exercises for all three quarters.⁸⁵

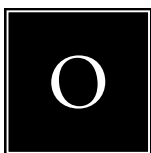
The published syllabi were equally noteworthy, since they provided all students with a “common field of reference” that they might rely upon to understand the lectures and other assigned readings, and thus helped to create intellectual anchors for the course. Given that the previous academic preparation that individual students brought to

84. Gideonse to Brumbaugh, October 31, 1935, p. 4, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

85. Walter H. Laves, “Report on the First Year of the Introductory Course in the Social Sciences,” pp. 2–3.

the general education courses was extremely varied, the common syllabi and common readings created an even playing field for all students to perform as effectively as possible.

O P E R A T I O N A L I Z I N G T H E N E W C U R R I C U L U M



nce the planning groups had developed plans for their courses, Dean of the College Chauncey Boucher sent their proposed syllabi to other, more senior, members of various departments for their comments.

Given the coalition nature of the courses in the biological and physical sciences, most colleagues either accepted the outlines or were indifferent to the projects, once it was clear that students seeking advanced training in the natural sciences could also select more specialized science sequences as free electives to supplement the work of the general surveys.⁸⁶ Among the humanists, the New Plan encountered skepticism from John Matthews Manly, the chair of the Department of English, who thought that the system of comprehensive examinations would be difficult to sustain and also worried that students would lack proper assistance “in determining their field of specialization early in their college course.” The humanities course itself earned a rebuke from Shailer Mathews, who complained about the absence of religion in the syllabus.

86. Mortimer Adler was Hutchins’s mole on the deliberations of the first curriculum committee in 1930–31 and reported on the strident demands of Hermann Schlesinger and Anton Carlson that departmental science courses be folded into the New Plan curriculum. See the undated letter from late January 1931, marked “Saturday,” in the *Mortimer Adler Papers*, Box 56.

But in general, faculty opinion deferred to Boucher and especially to Schevill, who had great prestige in the division.⁸⁷ The social sciences course became, in contrast, the object of considerable acrimony from the start, meeting with heated opposition from members of the Departments of Geography and Education. Harlan H. Barrows, the chair of the Department of Geography, denounced the enterprise as intellectually unwise, as a danger to specialization, and as ignoring the importance of students learning sufficient facts before they were invited to begin generalizations.⁸⁸ From the Department of Education came an even more strident reaction. Professor Henry C. Morrison of the Department of Education was so upset by the syllabus of the new course that he sent a five-page letter insisting that it be dropped from the curriculum.⁸⁹ In the first place Morrison was upset with what he called the course's "unscientific point of view," by which he meant that the instructors made no effort to teach the students a set of formal principles by which they might comprehend the social world. Morrison was convinced that "they do not propose to teach the truth, but rather the results of the *a priori* and empirical thinking which happens to be in style. . . . [T]hey propose to launch freshmen forthwith into studies which would perhaps be appropriate in

87. "Minutes of the Faculty of the Humanities Division," December 3, 1930, p. 1, and March 12, 1931, p. 1; Shailer Mathews to Chauncey Boucher, May 9, 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

88. "Minutes of the Executive Committee, Division of the Social Sciences," February 23, 1931, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 17; and "Minutes of the Department of History," January 24, 1931, p. 1, *Department of History Papers*, Box 19, folder 4. Barrows had written to Boucher a month earlier in the same vein. See Barrows to Boucher, January 21, 1931, *PP, 1925-1945*, Box 19, folder 9.

89. Morrison to Filbey, August 20, 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

advanced university courses.” Morrison gamely insisted that if the Division of the Social Sciences “has no principles to teach, it should release the freshmen to the other science divisions, which do have principles.” Moreover, allowing students to discuss original documents cold, with no set principles to guide them, was pedagogically irresponsible. Morrison viewed this as the equivalent of “setting people to expressing opinions about pneumonia, typhoid fever, infantile paralysis and sleeping sickness, who are quite innocent of any comprehension whatever of the underlying medical sciences.” Finally, Morrison predicted that the course would be a waste of time for the majority of students, whom he dismissed as being mere “confirmed lesson learners”; that still other students would be confused, bewildered, and discouraged; and that a final and larger group of students, who were “cocky and opinionated,” would end by becoming “mere intellectual and moral anarchists,” suffering from “distinct neurotic degeneration.”

In fact, Henry Morrison was correct in that the new social sciences course made no attempt to instill a body of principles in the students. Rather than imposing a set of fixed “principles,” Gideonse, Kerwin, and Wirth preferred that their students learn empirically the merits of conflicting theoretical approaches by reading and discussing an array of original documents and sources. Gideonse himself was dismissive of attempts to create a single social science that was based on fixed principles. The instructors consciously refused to tell the students what they should think, since that was, ultimately, a responsibility of the students themselves. As Gideonse later put it, “If there is one duty that could be singled out as the primary one for a college instructor in the social sciences, it would be to cultivate a gingerly attitude against easy generalizations and uninformed efforts to build ‘systems’.”⁹⁰

90. Gideonse to Brumbaugh, October 31, 1935, p. 7.

Notwithstanding Morrison's acerbic commentary about the social sciences course, and resistance from other departmental loyalists who feared a possible loss of their ability to attract first-year students to their own programs, the New Plan survey courses were launched in October 1931. For the most part, each course began smoothly and in a well-organized fashion. Given the pace and work load demanded by the new courses, which exceeded anything in the University's undergraduate programs in the past, it was not surprising that during the first year some students found the readings heavy going and the pace of work intimidating, so much so that Boucher was forced to write to the course leaders reporting frequent "complaints of students that they are overworked to the point of serious discouragement."⁹¹ He reminded the course chairs that each course was supposed to require about ten hours of work each week outside of class, and pointedly urged the faculty to "avoid everything that smacks of competition between courses for a lion's share of the student's time." Finally, although he admitted that there might be a small number of students who would find the New Plan to be over their heads, the course leaders should remind the students that with diligent work most of them would easily be able to master the material and pass the comprehensive examinations. The Dean of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, Charles W. Gilkey, encountered ambivalent responses when he surveyed 450 first-year College students in small groups during the Autumn Quarter of 1933. Gilkey found that the academic seriousness and dedication of the New Plan students was striking ("[t]here is less interest in undergraduate life, more serious concern about technical and academic phases of the University experiences in which they are situated. . . .

91. Boucher to M. C. Coulter *et al.*, October 30, 1931, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 8.

[A]dministration and 'old guard' [student] activity leaders should not be surprised at the ever increasing influence of such students upon the extracurricular and fraternity branches of the campus picture"), but he also encountered serious complaints about how difficult students found the transition from their high schools to the fast-paced rigor of the new general education courses in the College: "[t]here is very definite feeling that, for the best of students, the transition from high school atmospheres and methods of study to the University campus and its new plan is a difficult one, and there is not enough instruction and guidance as to methods of study for the new student."⁹² In February 1932, Boucher followed with another missive, urging that when the syllabi were revised, the number and amount of readings should be reduced, since "we seem to have erred very definitely on the side of too heavy a load for the average student."⁹³ Still, over time the courses attracted enthusiastic student constituencies, and the stronger academic quality of the students admitted after 1931 may have played a role in making the courses more sustainable. Students liked the balance between lecture and discussion and the emphasis on reading original documents; and their teachers found it challenging and stimulating.

Faculty ingenuity was able to respond to many of the initial adjustment programs, but often at the cost of creating other problems. For example, in the biological sciences, Merle Coulter found that "the transition from high school to our College was quite a shock to a good many

92. The results of these sessions were summarized in Warren E. Thompson, "A Report of the Nine Informal Freshman Discussion Groups at the Gilkey Home, Fall Quarter, 1933," *Archive of the College*, Box 2, folder 14.

93. Boucher to Schevill *et al.*, February 5, 1932, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 8.

students. The methods and total setting were so different that these students remained in a state of confusion of several months before settling down to a systematic, business-like attack upon their course of work. By that time they had become fairly well oriented but were in need of a review of the subject matter content of the first few months.” Coulter responded by organizing regular “review sessions,” which became so popular that they were organized throughout the year and which “flourished increasingly” over the 1930s. But Coulter soon realized that the sessions were flourishing too much, since they led students to cut their regular discussion meetings and attend the review sessions, which quickly became known as “cram” sessions for the comprehensive. Having substituted one problem for another, Coulter then restructured the review sessions so that they did not provide a comprehensive overview of the course, but only responded to particular, ad hoc problems generally faced by the weakest students. This put an end to the cramming culture associated with the biology general course, or at least deprived it of some of its oxygen.⁹⁴

The physical sciences course developed creative interventions to bring students in contact with the actual practice of science. Given the large numbers of students, it was not feasible to plan small-group labs. But Lemon and Schlesinger instead created permanent demonstrations in the form of a physics museum, a chemistry museum, and a geology museum, with demonstration lectures on astronomy at the Adler Planetarium. Lemon was particularly entrepreneurial in new visual materials. Developed in cooperation with the Museum of Science and Industry, the physics museum consisted of three rooms of about 3,000 square feet in Belfield Hall housing 125 experiments and exhibits that were self-operating

94. Coulter, “Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences,” October 1941, pp. 24–26.

or student operated.⁹⁵ The purpose of the museum was to expose students to a series of physics experiments in mechanics, heat, wave motion, sound, and light, beginning with the most simple and proceeding to the more complex. Lemon believed that the museums netted the University considerable positive publicity, and urged Boucher to see if the College could obtain what he shrewdly called “special consideration” from the central administration for sponsoring these exhibits.⁹⁶ Like Coulter, Lemon also developed several motion pictures for use in this course, which supplemented regular lectures and which afforded students the chance to return to demonstrations and experiments already studied and watch the course of an experiment attain a natural conclusion. Giving students the opportunity to review and restudy the critical stages of a key experiment about which they might be initially unclear would reveal to them the painstaking methods that scientists had to employ to understand more fully the contingent nature of their evidence.

Chauncey Boucher’s hope that a more rigorous curriculum would attract smarter and more able students also came to fruition. By the spring of 1932, Louis Thurstone, the University Examiner, reported to Boucher that “[I]t seems quite certain that we are attracting brighter students under the New Plan than the Old Plan. The exact reason for this may not be evident, but it is probably associated with the publicity for the New Plan.”⁹⁷ The challenges of the New Plan attracted many

95. See Harvey B. Lemon, “The Physics Museum of the University of Chicago and Its Relation to the New Curriculum,” *American Journal of Physics*, 2 (1934): 10–17.

96. See “Science Museum Exhibits Tried Out on Students,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1932, p. 16.

97. Thurstone to Boucher, March 18, 1932, as well as “General Course. First Year Examination, Autumn Quarter 1931,” *Archive of the College*, Box 15, folder 9.

gifted students, and Boucher developed a long list of stories that he regularly recited about the gifted nature of his students in the College.

The discussion leaders who were among the younger faculty found themselves caught up in the work, and they liked it. Bill Halperin, who later became a distinguished historian of modern Europe and as a young man taught one of the discussion sections of the social sciences general course, reported that

[m]any of the students were surprisingly alert and sophisticated, and at times the discussions were extremely suggestive and outspoken. . . . A very considerable number of the students have responded to the challenge by developing very excellent study habits. It is my impression that the New Plan students not only do more work than their old-plan predecessors, but approach their academic problems with greater alertness and understanding. The necessity of integrating and synthesizing data garnered from various fields of learning has provided the more intelligent and industrious students with that intellectual experience which, under existing educational conditions, to a large extent is reserved for post-graduate study.⁹⁸

Similarly, Mary Gilson commented on the excitement of teaching in such an open-ended course:

Surely no one can criticize the New Plan for regimenting or routinizing the instructor. On the contrary, it furnishes rich opportunities for initiative and experimentation, and no

98. Halperin to Boucher, May 27, 1933, Box 8, folder 2, *ibid.*

instructor can justly attribute to it any contribution toward a tendency on his part to go stale. In other words, dry rot may attack any instructor under any scheme, but the New Plan has in it potent antitoxins for counteracting such germs.⁹⁹

Equally positive reactions were evident among those teaching in the humanities general course. Eugene Anderson liked the increased responsibility that fell to discussion leaders in such a wide-ranging and at times unfocused course:

Since these students are so very young and immature the discussion leader has to make his material popular and he has to do better teaching than he has ever done. This is a point to emphasize—that it is the most difficult teaching, for there is no opportunity to play the taskmaster, you have to win your students and hold them just by the excellence of instruction and not by compulsion. This whole system puts a whole lot more responsibility on the teacher than any other one that I have ever taught under.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, James Cate praised the collegiality and open-mindedness of his colleagues, especially the senior scholars who led the course:

In many ways I consider our personnel an ideal one. It would be hard to assemble a more congenial group, or one composed

99. Gilson to Boucher, April 28, 1933, Box 8, folder 2, *ibid.*

100. Anderson to Boucher, May 22, 1933, Box 7, folder 2, *ibid.*

of men more eager to shoulder each his part of the load. There is no lack of differences of opinion, and some of our best measures have come as the result of heated discussions, yet once a general policy is laid down there is no refusal to cooperate on the part of dissident minorities. From the point of view of a junior member of the staff, perhaps the most pleasant feature of all has been the attitude of the various heads—Messrs. Schevill, Scott, and Lovett. There is no doubt in any case as to who is in charge of the course, but there is never any intimation of administrative or academic superiority. We younger members have been made to feel from the beginning that the humanities is very much our course, and I think the result has been a general loyalty and a deeper interest in the work.¹⁰¹

Three years later, Cate wrote that the combination of lecture and discussion, and particularly the focus on selected texts for more intensive interrogation,

widened the student's range of interest and have taught him where to go for the great classics and how to read them, projected each against its own age; if we have done this without undue distortion of the ground covered too rapidly, then we feel amply repaid for our efforts. My own opinion is that the Humanities Survey helps most students more than it harms them; more I would not say about any course.¹⁰²

101. Cate to Boucher, June 7, 1933, *ibid.*

102. James L. Cate, "An Introductory General Course in the Humanities," *The Social Studies*, 27 (1936): 157–164, here 164.

In June 1933, Harry Gideonse was asked by Chauncey Boucher to evaluate the social sciences course after its first two years.¹⁰³ Gideonse thought that the course had proven itself successful on several different fronts. In the most basic terms, the course generated high attendance at its lectures, even though they were not mandatory. The course also inspired students to question existing social conditions, and it enhanced their interest in discussing contemporary social problems. Gideonse found that most of his students demonstrated “active interest and spontaneous participation,” and continued to ask for more discussion of “current social phenomena around them.” Because the course was part of a shared and common matrix of expectations that all students had to meet, the course also helped create what Gideonse characterized as “a significant universe of discourse in our student body.” The methodology of the course—the interrogation of conflicting original sources—was beneficial because it trained students to uncover the intellectual premises that governed the work of the various authors they read. Gideonse noted that “[t]he other day one of my colleagues informed me that he was convinced that our present organization was one continuous process of indoctrination. What he meant to say was that he felt greater difficulty in presenting his particular type of social theory to students who had followed our particular course of training, because we had stressed in considerable detail the nature and presuppositions upon which his particular theory is based.” In other words, inviting students to read original works and think about the preconceptions and presuppositions that they contained was bound to be productively disruptive down the line.

Gideonse did believe that challenges lay ahead for the divisions to adjust the kinds of upper-level courses they would offer students coming

103. Gideonse to Boucher, June 9, 1933, Box 6, folder 8, *ibid.*

out of the general education program, since many faculty members were unused to interacting actively with students. He also reminded Boucher that if other universities were to adopt Chicago-like general education courses—which Boucher fondly hoped would happen—it had to be emphasized that the New Plan owed its success in large measure to the innovation, flexibility, and dedication of the new teachers, and not just to new curricular structures and materials: “The New Plan is not only a question of method, it is a matter of men and women. During the last two years we have had a remarkable change in the personnel teaching in the College courses in the social sciences. That is as worthy of stress as the change in the methods of instruction.” This point was to be of crucial significance for the future of the general education tradition at Chicago, and we will return to it later in this essay.

Gideonse was particularly proud of the fact that the New Plan had recruited a “higher caliber of students” and that those students found the social sciences course among the most challenging. Whereas in the 1920s social sciences courses were seen as “snap” courses, they now rivaled or even surpassed their counterparts from the other divisions in terms of the difficulty of mastering the material presented.¹⁰⁴

The natural scientists were equally pleased. Merle Coulter was proud of the fact that in his course the lectures were very effective, which he attributed to the fact that “[m]ost of the lecturers were imbued at the start with a strong desire to cooperate in our educational experiment; and most of them later discovered a substantial satisfaction in presenting their ideas to the large and rather appreciate audience of high-grade young Americans that they found in our course.” Coulter also stressed that his colleagues had made

104. “Sub-Committee on Curriculum,” January 14, 1935, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 16, pp. 2–3.

a strong effort not to overwhelm students with so many technical terms that they would fail to “master and apply” the seminal ideas of modern biology. He characterized this strategy as one of “detechnicalization.”¹⁰⁵ The biology course employed as discussion leaders only young post-docs, and it tried to select men with research ambitions who would find a home in the relevant department. The faculty associated with the course also produced a number of high-quality textbooks that supplemented the general syllabus.¹⁰⁶

After two years of teaching the physical sciences general course, Harvey Lemon found student “esprit de corps” high, and he defended the policy of having many different lecturers as necessary because of the “great sweep and wide diversity of technical subject matter covered.” In fact, Lemon believed the rotation of lectures among different faculty

supplies a frequent freshening of interest that is beneficial and in my judgment more than offsets the distinct disadvantage of this method, which produces a certain lack of unified technique of presentation and consequent unavoidable necessity on the part of the student to make readjustments and to sometimes indulge in inevitable invidious comparisons.¹⁰⁷

105. Coulter, “Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences,” October 1941, pp. 8, 10–11, 14.

106. Ralph Buchsbaum, *Animals without Backbones* (1938), A. J. Carlson and V. Johnson, *The Machinery of the Body* (1937), Fay-Cooper Cole, *The Long Road* (1933), M. C. Coulter, *The Story of the Plant Kingdom* (1935), H. Garrett, *Great Experiments in Psychology* (1930), H. H. Newman, *Evolution, Genetics, and Eugenics* (1932), and A. S. Romer, *Man and the Vertebrates* (1933).

107. Harvey B. Lemon, “Report on the First Five Quarters of the General Course in the Physical Sciences,” May 1933, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 1.

Discussion and large-group review sections were reasonably well attended and pedagogically effective, and Lemon noted of one of his colleague's reactions that "Dr. Bretz who was the most ardent objector of large group discussions . . . expressed himself as astonished and delighted a few weeks ago when over 150 students participated with him in one of the most stimulating and eager discussion groups which it has ever been the writer's privilege to witness." In general, because much of the material of the course was analytic rather than descriptive and the majority of students had no intention of pursuing advanced studies in science, Lemon believed that his course had made a "credible showing," in that students scored well on the final comprehensives and voluntary quizzes. He later asserted that

[w]e know that no inconsiderable number of our able students have been, and are, progressing through [the New Plan] with the utmost satisfaction and joy. This fact alone would seem not only to justify the experiment to date but to encourage the further attempt to carry it along and improve upon it. Indeed we know of no one who has been intimately associated with this work, either in our own or other divisions, who does not seem to share in a greater or less degree this general conviction.¹⁰⁸

The impact of the New Plan general education courses on the quality of our student body was momentous. A study undertaken in 1940 indicated that more students were completing their B.A. degree programs in

108. Harvey B. Lemon and Hermann I. Schlesinger, "After Five Years. An Appraisal of The Introductory General Course in the Physical Sciences," *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 1.

nine quarters or less than had done so before 1930. More important was the academic quality of the students and the impact that they had on campus student culture. Chauncey Boucher argued strongly in 1935 that the New Plan had seen a significant upgrading in the quality of the students: "Though we did not raise our entrance requirements, we hoped that the announcement of the New Plan would attract a larger number of superior students. This hope has been realized. We have had more applicants for admission than ever before from students who ranked in the top tenth of their graduating classes in excellent preparatory and high schools." This improvement in high school rankings was paralleled by significant increases in aptitude of matriculating students, as measured by the American Council on Education's Psychological Examination, which was administered to all entering first-year students. The median score achieved in 1933 was 38.5 percent higher than that achieved by Chicago students entering between 1928 and 1930.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, by 1934 University of Chicago students ranked third in the nation in aptitude for educational achievement out of 240 colleges and universities who participated in the examination.¹¹⁰

Given the enhanced aptitude of matriculating students, it was also not surprising that most New Plan students reported positive feelings about their educational experiences in the demanding new curriculum. A 1938–39 survey of 1,065 New Plan alumni who had completed the College between 1931 and 1935 revealed that a great majority were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of teaching that they experienced at Chicago, and that they were equally satisfied with what

109. Boucher, *The Chicago College Plan*, p. 110.

110. "Facts about Undergraduates at the University of Chicago," *Archive of the College*, Box 15, folder 2.

they had learned in their general education courses in the College. When asked “should every student be required to take the [general education] survey courses?,” almost 89 percent of the respondents answered affirmatively. The young alumni were equally convinced (72 percent) that the instructional materials of the general education courses were well organized and that they got a lot out of the courses in which they participated (73 percent). Seventy-eight percent of the alumni believed that the New Plan curriculum gave them a greater satisfaction in living their lives. And, not surprisingly, almost 88 percent answered yes to the question: “Did you like the freedom allowed under the New Plan?”¹¹¹

Of course from the distance of seventy years, it is difficult to apply the kinds of fine-grained evaluation mechanisms that we would use today. Still, the slow acceleration of time to degree and the generally favorable image that the University clearly had in the eyes of these students suggest that Chauncey Boucher’s gamble of 1930–31—that a more challenging and difficult curriculum but also one that was more coherently organized and efficiently taught would lead to more gifted students enrolling in the University—was proven correct.

But the impact of the New Plan was also evident in the external operations of the College. The collapse of big-time football in the late 1930s was attributed by many to the fact that the College was now recruiting more academically oriented students, which had an adverse

111. “Students at the University of Chicago,” 1940–41, pp. 7–8, *ibid.* See also the “Report of an Evaluation of the College Program of the University of Chicago by Students Who Entered the College in the Autumn Quarters of 1933, 1934, and 1935,” *ibid.*, Box 9, folder 12. This survey has comparative evaluative data from 648 students on student satisfaction with the four general education survey courses. Of the four, the biological sciences course was by far the most popular.

impact on the competitive athletic position of Chicago within the Big Ten: "There have rarely been, in recent years, more than two or three *Maroon* regulars who could make the second or third teams at other big Ten Schools."¹¹² Robin Lester has concluded that "the New Plan, adopted in 1931, resulted in a brighter, more critical student body and one much less likely to have participated in athletics at secondary school or on the Midway."¹¹³ The New Plan did privilege sturdier and more resilient students, as Bill Halperin confirmed when he observed that "[t]he greatest praise for the New Plan invariably comes from the superior students, while the sharpest criticism emanates from those who find it very difficult to adapt themselves to the novel features of the present arrangement."¹¹⁴

The educational impact of the new general education courses on student culture went beyond the classroom to encourage what Walter Laves described as

the inter-stimulation of a large group which goes through the same study at the same time. It has been fun to watch the spread of a new term or idea throughout the whole group via lectures, dormitory discussions, small informal and formal group "sessions", and so forth, with the echo, in the form of questions or disputes that arise in these discussions, coming

112. Quoted in Robin Lester, *Stagg's University. The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago* (Urbana, 1995), pp. 182–183.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

114. Halperin to Boucher, May 27, 1933, p. 4, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

back to the faculty. The common and cumulative building up of a field of reference or universe of discourse was never as obvious under the old plan, the effort was more scattered, students could not take it for granted that their classmates were interested in the same notions and as a consequence study was not nearly as obviously a major activity as it now seems likely to become.¹¹⁵

Laves, who had been an undergraduate student at Chicago between 1919 and 1923 and thus knew the pre-New Plan curriculum personally, described a revolutionary side effect of the general courses—namely, that they helped create a powerful group consciousness among undergraduate students, all of whom were now involved in deeply challenging collective experiences. To the extent that the University of Chicago came to have a distinctive and intensely self-conscious academic culture in the twentieth century, this factor was of enormous import.

The initial success of the New Plan did not preclude certain operational problems, and these became clearer as the years wore on. The comprehensive exams generated divergent, and sometimes questionable, practices involving tutors. Some students sought “extra” help in prepping for the exams, which often amounted to circumventing the need for attending lectures. Issues of conflict of interest soon arose regarding whether those individuals who were associated with the courses and had a role in the formulation of the exams should also be permitted to tutor students for extra compensation. Boucher was firm in his opposition to such practices, but the very existence of such “off-shore” practices

115. Walter H. Laves, “Report on the First Year of the Introductory Course in the Social Sciences,” pp. 13–14.

highlighted the reservations of those who opposed the comprehensive exams on other grounds.¹¹⁶

Some reservations emerged even among the faculty teaching the courses. The younger instructors canvassed in 1933 also pointed to serious problems, particularly lack of coherence in the lectures, unevenness in student preparation to cope with fast paced courses requiring huge amounts of reading, occasional student confusion over the “big picture” that the courses were trying to convey, lack of coordination among the four survey courses, unevenness in the success of the discussion groups, and great frustration with the comprehensive exams, which many instructors felt required too much of their time to construct and which failed to measure adequately the achievement of the students.

Arthur P. Scott complained as early as 1933 that “partly as a result of the pressure of time to finish the syllabi in short order, the four courses were prepared with virtually no consultation between the four committees in charge.”¹¹⁷ Similarly, Louis Wirth was concerned with the fact that the founders of the four courses had not

arrived at any fundamental consensus as to our notion of general education. Individually and in a sort of formal way we have expressed ourselves on this subject. We have not been able to “sell” our ideas to one another and cannot therefore be very effective in “selling” them to the world at large, not to speak of our students.¹¹⁸

116. Boucher to Louis L. Thurstone, June 8, 1935, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 2.

117. Scott to Boucher, November 1, 1933, *ibid.*, Box 7, folder 2.

118. Wirth to Hutchins, September 13, 1935, *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 19, folder 4.

Worries about overload and heavy reading assignments that were too schematic and superficial were also troublesome. Ferdinand Schevill complained to Boucher about the danger of overwork that was built into the New Plan, and he suggested on several occasions that the reading load of the new humanities course was too heavy. He also worried about its all-too-inclusive quality, urging that some restrictions on the range of topics and more focus on whole books would be desirable.¹¹⁹ Lest Scott take this as a concession to Robert Hutchins, Schevill added candidly that

[y]ou may say that I am raising the President's cry against the pouring out of mere facts and in favor of directive concepts. I have less reason for denying the impeachment as I have taken essentially the same position for the larger part of my teaching career and have certainly represented it from the first in my discussions with you.¹²⁰

Scott, too, wanted the College to provide the humanities course with more resources, so that the number of lectures could be reduced and the discussion sections increased, but he received little support for his requests.¹²¹

119. Boucher to Schevill and Scott, May 27, 1932, and Schevill to Boucher, June 16, 1932, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

120. "I think our range of subject matter is so excessive as to be unmanageable; and I crave restriction, precision, and definiteness in place of the loose, illogical encyclopedism now in practice." Schevill to Scott, May 12, 1934, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

121. See Brumbaugh to Scott, April 29, 1938, *ibid.* Brumbaugh admitted that Scott had "raised the question several times with reference to increasing the number of discussion periods and reducing the number of lectures in Humanities I." Brumbaugh was either unable or unwilling to support these requests.

Tensions with the departments were also evident, as department chairmen tried to influence the appointment of discussion leaders who would be assigned to the general courses. In 1932, Ferdinand Schevill threatened to resign in protest over what he felt to be William Dodd's unauthorized meddling in the teaching roster for the humanities course.¹²² Boucher talked Schevill out of it, but the incident highlighted the political fragility in which the new courses operated and the latent structural tensions between the College's interests and those of the departments.

The new system of comprehensives also encountered resistance. Harvey Lemon thought that the examiner's office manifested a lack of "creative critical helpfulness" to the faculty of the general courses, relying too much on faculty initiative and manifesting "too little initiative and drive."¹²³ Walter H. Laves laconically opined that "[t]he comprehensive examinations have been the most disputed part of the new program as far as our course is concerned. The preparation of questions has taken more time than any other feature of the new arrangements. In the minds of most of those concerned with the course the results have *not* corresponded with the effort. Judging by conversations with our colleagues in parallel courses these impressions are not limited to our group." Laves added, "It is difficult for an inexperienced group like the Board of Examiners to realize just how much work and time the faculty has to put into such a task."¹²⁴

122. Schevill to Boucher, May 26, 1932, and Boucher to Schevill, May 27, 1932, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 2.

123. "Report on the First Five Quarters of the General Course in the Physical Sciences," p. 12, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 1.

124. Walter H. Laves, "Report on the First Year of the Introductory Course in the Social Sciences," pp. 4, 9, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

Over time, faculty also became unhappy with the failure of some students to show up for lectures and discussion sections, even though these were, in theory, voluntary and not mandatory. Given the high professionalism of the faculty and their investment of time to prepare their lectures and discussions, it was understandable they might become irritated if some students treated their efforts in a cavalier manner.¹²⁵ By 1936, Harvey Lemon and Hermann Schlesinger had become sufficiently disillusioned with student attempts to game the system by picking and choosing which lectures they would attend and which materials they would read in order to pass the final comprehensive exams that they recommended that no student should be allowed to sit for a final comprehensive unless he/she had passed successfully the three quarterly examinations that were embedded as advisory instruments in the structure of the physical sciences general education course.¹²⁶ Although Lemon and Schlesinger continued to pay lip service to the idea of final comprehensive examinations, their proposal was in essence a strong, if oblique, criticism of a key behavioral premise of the New Plan—namely, that students should have perfect freedom to prepare for their comprehensive exams in whatever way seemed most appropriate to them.

The unhappiness of faculty with students not fully engaging the material and instead cramming for the comprehensives was confirmed by a study in 1939 that found that middle- and lower-ability students who merely audited the survey courses were likely to receive lower scores on their final comprehensives than students who participated more fully

125. W. C. Krumbein to Brumbaugh, November 5, 1936, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.

126. Lemon and Schlesinger, "After Five Years. An Appraisal of the Introductory General Course in the Physical Sciences," p. 11.

by taking quarterly exams and quizzes for advisory grades. This finding, coming just before the outbreak of World War II, suggested that class attendance and focus on the material discussed in class were important, especially for students who were ranked in the middle or lower echelons of academic ability. Today we would take the idea that the personal interaction between faculty and students was a vital and constitutive part of the learning process and that the classroom work of teachers did matter as obvious and self-evident, but at the time it seemed to undercut the rhetoric of freedom that was at the foundation of Boucher's original New Plan design from 1931.¹²⁷

Issues of transition in the staffs of the graduate students and young faculty who served as discussion leaders also posed challenges, since each staff was bound to experience comings and goings. In November 1936, Aaron Brumbaugh broached the idea of creating half-time internships for apprentice discussion leaders so that they might become familiar with the courses.¹²⁸ In the spring of 1939, Brumbaugh then asked the directors of the general courses to provide written statements of the purposes and objectives of each of their courses.¹²⁹ This latter request reflected the impact of Ralph Tyler's appointment as the University Examiner in 1938. Tyler wanted the general education staffs to design examinations that reflected and supported each course's synoptic learning goals, which

127. "The Achievement in Comprehensive Examinations of Students Who Received 'R' in Quarterly Reports Compared with Students Who Received Qualitative Quarterly Marks," Summer 1939, *Archive of the College*, Box 15, folder 2.

128. See his proposal from November 1936 in *ibid.*, Box 6, folder 9.

129. A. J. Brumbaugh to P. H. Boynton *et al.*, March 16, 1939, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9.

would allow the exams to measure the achievement of students in terms of the purposes and objectives of the course.¹³⁰ Tyler's theoretical aims may have been salutary, but the fact that the staffs were now compelled to generate detailed statements about the goals of their courses was a sign that the initial rush of ad hoc experimentation was slowing down, and that more systematic forms of institutionalization were needed in order for the general education program to sustain itself. This trend raised the longer-term issue of whether new instructors joining the courses in the future would share the same values and same aspirations as the original architects. The creation of guidelines for "in-service" procedures in 1941 to ensure proper training and socialization of new staff members was also a sign of such institutionalization.¹³¹ Both processes accentuated and compelled the more formal development of staffs qua staffs, which by the later 1940s even had official charters and rules of procedure. The curricular upheavals of 1942–46 resulted in even more sophisticated and self-conscious attempts on the part of the general education staffs to articulate the pedagogical and methodological goals of each of their courses, so that they could be scrutinized and

130. Interview of Benjamin Bloom with Christopher Kimball, April 14, 1986, p. 22; June 4, 1986, p. 41; February 5, 1987, pp. 77–80, *Oral History Program*. See, also Bloom, "Changing Conceptions of Examining at the University of Chicago," pp. 304–310; and "The Construction and Use of Examinations in the College of the University of Chicago. A Statement by the University Examiner," February 9, 1950, *Archive of the College, Series 98–41*, Box 99.

131. "The In-Service Training of Staff Members in the Introductory General Courses and English 102 in the College Division," May 12, 1941, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 9. This document summarized the individual statements sent to Brumbaugh in February 1941 by Merle Coulter, Arthur Scott, R. J. Stephenson, Walter Laves, and Percy Boynton (English composition).

debated by faculty from other fields.¹³² This in turn led to shared modes of educational discourse about the goals and objectives of the College's general education program as a whole, a body of discourses that, more than anything else, gave an aura of distinctiveness to the Hutchins College at its zenith between 1947 and 1954.

W I D E R C H A L L E N G E S
A N D O P P O R T U N I T I E S O F
T H E N E W P L A N

The creation of the New Plan had an impact on the wider instructional culture of the University. This can be illustrated by examining its relationship to the Division of the Social Sciences and to the School of Business. A particularly thorny issue emerged in the Division of the Social Sciences relating to the kind of baccalaureate program that social sciences majors would complete in order to qualify for a B.A. degree after they finished the College's two-year general education curriculum. In 1931 the faculty in the Division of the Social Sciences had decided that a student who wished to obtain a B.A. degree had to take at least five of seven possible introductory courses, each representing one of the social sciences departments, and to sit for a comprehensive examination assembled from questions drawn from these courses. In addition, the student also had to specialize in a single subject as a major field of study and to take six other upper-level courses in the division as

132. An early example of this genre is the seventeen-page memorandum, "Relationships Among Social Sciences 1, Social Sciences 2, and Social Sciences 3," 1946–47, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

free electives. The departmentally based introductory courses, each bearing the generic number of 201, were mounted in a hodgepodge fashion in 1932. Within three years considerable unhappiness had emerged about the value of these courses, and in late 1934 the divisional Dean, Robert Redfield, appointed an ad hoc subcommittee on the divisional curriculum to investigate the effectiveness of the 201 courses, their relationship to the wider domain of undergraduate education in the social sciences, and their relationship to the New Plan's general education sequences. Redfield explained to Hutchins that he hoped the ad hoc committee might undertake a "thorough review of the curriculum of the Division and to make recommendations for changes." Redfield was frustrated by the fact that "[a]t present the student is confronted with a list of courses, which vary enormously in character, and some of which are plain fakes." In addition to the 201 courses, Redfield also hoped that the committee would survey departmental course offerings more generally, with a goal of determining "which of them represent frontiers of science and scholarship on which the man giving the course is operating, and which of them represent substantially 'canned' material."¹³³ Ideally, Redfield also wanted the departments to decide what they were trying to accomplish with their courses and to say so publicly, so that the students would be able to make more informed decisions about which courses to take.

For over a year, Herbert Blumer, Charles Judd, Frank Knight, Frederick Schuman, and Redfield himself labored to understand how best to teach social sciences to third- and fourth-year undergraduates. The subcommittee heard, almost as a grand jury, testimony from an array of influential historians and social scientists. Fay-Cooper Cole of the

133. Redfield to Hutchins, November 12, 1934, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 16.

Department of Anthropology argued that integration was already a stated goal of the social sciences general course in the College, and that the interrelationships among the social sciences could be better articulated there than in more advanced courses. Cole also attacked several of the sacred cows of the New Plan, insisting that students now were more likely to work less than ten years previously, because they were not compelled to attend class and take course-based examinations. Cole believed that the new comprehensive examination system had encouraged bad study habits by allowing the student too much independence from conventional instruction (“[u]nder the old system students were encouraged to do independent work through term papers; now they are encouraged only to pass examinations”). Cole wanted the comprehensive exams to be based on the actual courses that faculty taught, not the courses to be based upon the final comprehensive exams.¹³⁴

The next witness was Harry Gideonse, who defended the integrating principle that informed the “Social Sciences I” course (the nature of contemporary society under the impact of rapid industrialization). Gideonse also had a rather low opinion of the 201 courses, which he felt were simply a rehash of general materials already covered effectively in the College’s general education sequences. Gideonse argued that students should be required to take at most three (instead of five) of the 201 courses, spending more of their time on genuinely specialized courses where they could engage in specialized work. In strong contrast to Cole, Gideonse believed that the New Plan students were brighter and worked harder than students from the 1920s. Finally, Gideonse mentioned that he did support a great works of social sciences honors

134. “Report of the Sub-Committee on Curriculum,” December 17, 1934, pp. 1–11, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 16.

course that sought to integrate multiple perspectives on doing social sciences, but insisted that this was most appropriate for seniors, not for freshmen, thus implicitly rebuking Hutchins's and Adler's venture with first-year students.¹³⁵

Like Gideonse, Louis Wirth defended in his interview the integrated nature of the social sciences general course, which was not a combination of three disciplines, but rather used disciplinary material from all of the social sciences. At the same time Wirth was not fully satisfied with the general course, since he "hoped that over-emphasis on examinations could be minimized in order to improve student morale and to encourage intensive work with zest, interest and spontaneity." Because the College faced serious budget restrictions, it was forced to overburden the members of its teaching staffs. Wirth also worried about the dangers of over organization for the faculty themselves, insisting that the individual instructors might be discouraged by having to follow standardized syllabi, which "destroys spontaneity and cramps teaching style." And also like Gideonse, Wirth had a low opinion of the 201 courses, which "let down" the students because of their "disparate, isolated" structures and "make shift" qualities.¹³⁶

William Hutchinson represented the views of the historians, and his comments were more akin to Cole's. Hutchinson's discussion revolved around the College's general education sequences as much as it did the division's 201 courses. Hutchinson thought that the "old plan" of undergraduate studies was deservedly dead and buried, and that the New Plan had brought Chicago students who were "more alert, broader, more willing

135. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," January 14, 1935, pp. 1-9, *ibid.*

136. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," January 23, 1935, pp. 1-9, *ibid.*

to challenge lecturers and books, more critical and resilient.” At the same time these same students were only interested in learning generalizations, not facts, which led the students to have “a large amount of intellectual arrogance” for which they needed “to be taught some humility.” Hutchinson blamed “the general courses in the College, where whole civilizations are set up and knocked down within a few days, although the College denies this charge. Students are interested in studying the past only as a series of problems, without reference to time, space and background.”¹³⁷ Another critical problem was that the New Plan “actually squeezes out the teacher. With syllabi, optional class attendance, etc., the teacher is reduced in status, becomes merely a walking bibliography.”

There was broad agreement on the part of all interviewed that, as Louis Wirth put it, “as they now stand our 201 courses fail to synthesize the social subject matter of the social sciences and probably cannot be sufficiently modified (as long as they are given by separate departments) to satisfy the need for a well-articulated and integrated general training in the social sciences.”¹³⁸ Wirth’s statement begged the question of whether the faculty could actually imagine and agree upon a common set of assumptions as to what constituted nondepartmentally based social sciences. The challenge of imagining how one might “integrate” social sciences via interdisciplinary or comparative course work for College juniors and seniors then preoccupied the committee, resulting in numerous memoranda and position papers for and against.

The debates in the committee itself were vigorous. The discussions inevitably ranged over a wide array of topics that were not very related,

137. “Sub-Committee on Curriculum,” January 29, 1935, p. 6, *ibid.*

138. Wirth to Redfield, undated [January 1935], *ibid.*

from the quality of high school teaching in the United States to the quality of textbooks used in secondary education to duplication of courses among related departments to the quality of lecturing that was done by the divisional faculty to the time that faculty had to do research (Charles Merriam insisted that the University did not need to have sabbaticals since “every year is a sabbatical year for anyone who wishes to do research”) to the alleged mixture of ideology and politics that was now afflicting secondary school education.¹³⁹

But there was little consensus on the specific issue that was the originating point of the committee: the future of the seven 201 courses. Some, like Charles Judd, disliked the whole arrangement, arguing that the generalizing work of such courses ought to be done in the College and not the division, and wanted them abolished. Fay-Cooper Cole, in contrast, thought that the College was not in a position to provide such a systematic introduction to multiple disciplines, believing it could only be done by the departments. Robert Redfield believed that the division did have the responsibility for creating interdisciplinary courses in comparative social sciences on a higher level than could or should be done in the College. Using the image of the divisional curriculum as a “pyramid involving gradual and progressive specialization,” he proposed in March 1935 a scheme of six new courses that might replace the departmentally based 201 courses.¹⁴⁰ These courses were to include “Social Life: Its Nature and Setting,” a study of the biological roots of human nature and behavior, the human habitat, and the social and cognitive structure of human behavior; “A Comparative Study of Culture

139. “Sub-Committee on Curriculum,” February 4, 1935, *ibid.*

140. “Sub-Committee on Curriculum,” March 11, 1935, *ibid.*

Types,” a study of the structure of literate and nonliterate cultures and societies in the contemporary world; “History and Social Sciences,” a review of the historical perspective and of basic types of historical methodology, including those used in archaeology and prehistory, as well as types of historical interpretation and the functions of history; “Statistics in the Social Sciences,” an introduction to quantification in the social sciences, including statistical concepts, measurement, sampling, probability, and correlations; and a two-quarter course on “Social Science and Social Action,” a discussion of basic concepts of political science and economics, focusing on democratic government as a mode of social choice, state direction in a free-market economy, the role of education and pressure groups in influencing changes in social attitudes, and the types of group behavior resulting from conflicting social and economic interests.¹⁴¹ Redfield believed that the division had the responsibility to continue the work of general education begun in the College, but on a higher and more sophisticated level, focusing on the multiple ways that the individual disciplines confronted common social issues and phenomena. He also believed that it was a responsibility of the University of Chicago to show leadership in American higher education and research and to do more than merely “perpetuate the conventional division of labor in the social sciences field and preserve the departmental presentations of subject-matter.”¹⁴²

Redfield’s proposed new courses would move toward the idea of an integrated social science by a series of pincer-like interventions. His

141. See the draft in Redfield to the Members of the Sub-Committee, August 27, 1935, *ibid.*

142. Memorandum of Robert Redfield, December 10, 1935, *ibid.*

program was in fact a brilliant conceptual attempt to do two things at once. He hoped to continue the revolutionary curricular élan of the early 1930s, but on a higher level, by providing more transparent interdisciplinary pathways from the new general education of the College to the hyper-specialization of the departments. He also hoped to create a greater sense of supra-departmental consciousness within the division itself, making the division more than a series of isolated and mutually distrusting political units. Redfield's courses were to be created by volunteers drawn from different departments, and students wishing to major in the social sciences would be required to take all six courses and a common final examination that would be "genuinely integrated" in drawing from the materials of all of the courses. Fittingly, Robert Hutchins found Redfield's proposals to "mark a great advance over the 201 courses. I beg to offer my congratulations to the Dean and the committee."¹⁴³

Yet Hutchins's congratulations were premature. When Redfield submitted his proposals to the faculty of the departments, he encountered both active and passive resistance.¹⁴⁴ This was particularly the case in political science where Quincy Wright, Frederick L. Schuman, and Jerome Kerwin wrote trenchant commentaries on Redfield's proposals. Wright, who was the most senior, was also the most negative. He insisted that the integration of the social sciences was a virtual phantom that was both meaningless and dangerous unless a student had first mastered the individual scholarly disciplines. For Wright, the proper function of an undergraduate curriculum was to encourage differentiation and not

143. Hutchins to Redfield, October 16, 1935, *ibid.*

144. See the comments reported in "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," December 11, 1935, *ibid.*

integration.¹⁴⁵ Frederick Schuman, in contrast, thought that to postpone such integrative work to graduate school—which is essentially what Wright proposed—was to consign it to oblivion, since graduate programs were inevitably even more specialized. Schuman also argued that the current individual disciplines of the social sciences were products of a nineteenth-century political and social imagination in which economics never impinged on politics and where social issues were kept distinctly apart from the state and its scientific sponsorship. For Schuman, the contemporary world of the 1930s showed how antiquated this compartmentalization of the social sciences had become—politics could no longer be written in ignorance of economics or sociology, for example. If Chicago were serious about teaching a truly modern perspective on the social sciences, it would have to develop curricular modes that represented the scrambled quality of the world of knowledge and action.¹⁴⁶ Jerome Kerwin sided with Wright, urging that the departments offer seven to eight disciplinary courses that would “acquaint the student with the standards of criticism toward observations of social phenomena and concepts about social phenomena employed by the most advanced contemporary social sciences.” Although these courses would reflect upon general questions, they would be controlled and staffed by the individual departments, which was in effect, a return to the status quo.¹⁴⁷

145. “Comments on the Recommendation of the Sub-Committee on Curriculum Created by the Executive Committee of the Division of the Social Sciences,” *ibid.*

146. “Comments on the Memorandum of October 28, 1935 Submitted by Professor Quincy Wright in Commentary on the Recommendation of the Divisional Subcommittee on Curriculum,” *ibid.*

147. “Memorandum in Organization of Undergraduate Work in the Social Sciences,” October 28, 1935, *ibid.*

Nor did Redfield's proposal gain unalloyed support from the College, since Gideonse and Wirth, representing the College, insisted that much of what Redfield's committee wanted to achieve was already present in the existing social sciences general courses.¹⁴⁸ In the end, Redfield encountered disharmony from the various departments, where uncertainty reigned about who would teach these new courses and whether they would lead to lower profile, perhaps invisibility, for their particular departments. Facing what Charles Judd called "the phenomenon of mutual interdepartmental distrust," among the various departments, Redfield settled for a modest compromise.¹⁴⁹ The existing departmental 201 courses were left in place, but he was authorized to encourage the experimental creation of a few more boldly interdisciplinary ventures that would highlight the "general underlying importance of the fields selected to all students in the social sciences. . . . The selection and organization would not be dictated by departmental interests or follow strict departmental lines."¹⁵⁰ Redfield hoped that these new courses would "make a tremendous contribution to the progress of Social Science and put the Division far ahead of any other institution in this field."¹⁵¹ However this proved to be little more than face-saving, since none of the new experimental courses were mounted before the coming of the war. After the recentering of the B.A. degree in early 1942,

148. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," May 6, 1935, *ibid.*

149. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," December 11, 1935, *ibid.*

150. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," March 5, 1936; "Report of the Subcommittee on Curriculum, Division of the Social Sciences," March 9, 1936, *ibid.*

151. "Sub-Committee on Curriculum," August 13, 1935, *ibid.*

which eliminated any role for the departments in Chicago's undergraduate curriculum, the effort was structurally less compelling in any event. In the end, Redfield wrote ruefully, if also humorously, to Hutchins that "[t]he stirrings as to curriculum in this Division are nothing to shout about. The mountain labored and brought forth a few grasshoppers."¹⁵² The failure of Redfield's plan must have been a clear sign to Hutchins that Charles Judd was correct in arguing that both the departments and the faculty associated with the 1931 general education courses stood in an unholy alliance. It might be said that the path toward the radical decision that Hutchins took in 1942—which essentially stripped the departments of any role in undergraduate education at Chicago—was more clearly marked out after the failure of Redfield's scheme of 1935–36.

If the Division of the Social Sciences struggled to exploit the efficacy of the New Plan and to connect it in innovative ways to more specialized domains of knowledge, the School of Business found Boucher's new general education program to provide an ideal solution to serious educational problems it had faced for over a decade. It is a little-remembered fact that from 1898 until 1946 the University had an undergraduate business major, becoming by 1914 "a leader in collegiate education for business" and developing a curriculum that "had a profound influence on programs of collegiate training throughout the United States."¹⁵³ In 1932, the School of Commerce and Administration (renamed the School of Business in the same year) had 211 undergraduate students, compared with 55 graduate students, and the tuition income of the under-

152. Redfield to Hutchins, July 15, 1936, *ibid.*

153. "Business Training and Research," July 1930, p. 1, *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 110, folder 6.

graduates was by far the largest share of unrestricted revenue available to the school.¹⁵⁴ After a hiatus of seven years, the College and the (now renamed) Graduate School of Business established a Professional Option Program in 1953, under which College students could double count the first year of the school's M.B.A. curriculum for their senior year in the College.¹⁵⁵ For most of our institutional history, therefore, we have offered interested College students the possibility of an undergraduate business program. The University's long experience with professional education was strengthened by the creation of the New Plan, since after 1931 a primary requirement for the admission of Chicago students to the school's business major became the completion of the New Plan's general education courses. The School of Commerce and Administration had hoped as early as the mid-1920s to more sharply demarcate the boundary between liberal-arts general education in the first two years of college and the more specialized studies, which students could pursue in the field of commerce in the second two years.¹⁵⁶ It wanted to base itself on "general education as administered in secondary schools and junior colleges." In 1926, the school decided to abandon instruction in the first two years

154. In Autumn Quarter 1932, undergraduates paid \$23,888 in tuition, as opposed to \$4,166 paid by graduate students. "A Comparative Statement of Tuition in the School of Business, Autumn Quarter, 1931 and Autumn Quarter, 1932," *PP, 1925-1945*, Box 110, folder 4.

155. This was accomplished by the faculty of the College agreeing in late December 1953 to accept nine courses from the Graduate School of Business as counting toward a baccalaureate degree, thus recreating a system that offered a (*de facto*) business program for College students.

156. W. H. Spencer, "Memorandum on Business Training and Research at the University of Chicago," 1930, pp. 9-11, *PP, 1925-1945*, Box 110, folder 4.

of undergraduate life to the liberal arts colleges of the University.¹⁵⁷ The creation of a separate College in 1930 and the New Plan curriculum in 1931 thus came at exactly the right moment for the school, which renamed itself the School of Business in 1932 and announced that its educational purview would be focused on the final two years of undergraduate education and an additional year that would lead to a master's degree.¹⁵⁸ The school's faculty believed that future businessmen and women had to be exposed to a rigorous introduction to the major fields of the liberal arts via the New Plan general education courses, especially courses in the social, biological, and physical sciences, which the school deemed particularly important "in view of the highly inter-dependent character of modern society in which business is carried on."¹⁵⁹ As early as 1926, Leon C. Marshall, the former Dean of the School of Commerce, had argued, "When the education of business executives is broadly conceived, antagonism between vocational education and liberal education disappears. . . . Vocational education for the task of the business executive includes and must include liberal education."¹⁶⁰ Two years later Marshall insisted, "[l]et us accept the attitude that 'general education' should never

157. L. C. Marshall to Max Mason, June 26, 1926, *ibid.*, Box 101, folder 10.

158. See Floyd W. Reeves, W. E. Peik, and John Dale Russell, *Instructional Problems in the University* (Chicago, 1933), pp. 134–135.

159. "Business Training and Research," July 1930, pp. 9–10, *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 110, folder 10.

160. Leon C. Marshall, "The Collegiate School of Business at Erehwon," *Journal of Political Economy*, 34 (1926): 298–299. More generally, see Leon C. Marshall, ed., *The Collegiate School of Business: Its Status at the Close of the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1928), esp. pp. 3–44, 189–203.

be thought of as something which has been ‘completed’; and let us agree that a true professional school is vitally concerned with both ‘general education’ and ‘social values.’ ”¹⁶¹ Marshall’s thinking about business education was greatly influenced by his work on the University committee chaired by Chauncey Boucher in 1928, which produced the first report calling for a radical reform of undergraduate education at Chicago that included the creation of a serious program of general education.¹⁶² Marshall’s ideas had a strong impact on his colleagues. As Professor Wesley N. Mitchell of the school put it in 1939,

[f]rom the very beginning of this development in collegiate education, the School of Business has assumed its full share of responsibility for elevating standards of business education. The program of the School is designed to develop initiative, independence, and resourcefulness among its students. It places emphasis upon a sense of relationships, upon effective habits of work, and upon ability to analyze and solve problems. . . . Through analysis of business situations and problems it endeavors to train students to think effectively and consistently about these problems and to form valid business judgments.¹⁶³

As a result of the curricular connection between the newly created College and the School of Commerce, throughout the 1930s and early

161. Leon C. Marshall, “A University School of Business,” *ibid.*, p. 199.

162. “Report of the Senate Committee on the Undergraduate Colleges,” May 7, 1928, *Archive of the College*, Box 27, folder 6.

163. Wesley N. Mitchell to Emery Filbey, November 30, 1939, *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 110, folder 4.

1940s hundreds of students transferred to the school after completing their general education curriculum in the College and graduated with a B.A. degree in business. Unlike the case of the social sciences, the School of Business had no desire to create additional intermediary structures between general and more specialized education. For the School of Business, the New Plan thus provided a perfect transition point that justified the operation of a more focused and analytically grounded curriculum of business education for advanced undergraduates.

**COLLISIONS AT THE TOP:
ROBERT HUTCHINS AND THE
CRITIQUE OF THE NEW PLAN**

Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the New Plan program was that the new President, Robert M. Hutchins, felt substantial ambivalence toward it and toward several of its leaders. It is one of the great ironies of our history that the man usually associated with the founding of the Core—Robert Hutchins—came to dislike the general education courses that Boucher’s teams had put together. In fact, many of the leaders of these courses became ardent opponents of Hutchins’s leadership as time went on. Maynard Krueger, who as a young instructor in the 1930s had witnessed Hutchins’s covert criticisms of the New Plan firsthand, later recalled, “The new College [curriculum] had been initiated before Hutchins ever got hold of it, and it was not being planned on the basis of which Hutchins would have preferred.” According to Krueger, Hutchins’s connection with Mortimer Adler in 1930 already predisposed him toward a “heavy emphasis on the Great Books.” Hutchins “would have preferred that from the very beginning it be what he did

make a great effort to make it later, but at the time, the people who were doing that reorganizing were not Hutchins's preferred people."¹⁶⁴

Beginning in the fall of 1930, Robert Hutchins had indeed collaborated with a young, brash, and highly controversial scholar from Columbia University, Mortimer Adler, in organizing a "Great Books" honors course each quarter over a two-year cycle. Modeled on a similar course taught at Columbia University by John Erskine, the seminar was called the "General Honors 110" (in 1934, it was renamed "Classics of the Western World"), and in the first year it assigned extensive readings from the works of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Vergil, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, the New Testament, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Cervantes, and other worthies (the second year then ran from Duns Scotus to Freud).¹⁶⁵ The course met two hours a week on Tuesday evenings, with no formal lectures. The twenty freshmen who were enrolled were responsible for doing all of the assigned reading for each class. Their evaluation consisted of an oral exam administered by outside examiners, as well as an essay exam based on the analysis of selected quotes. The reactions of the outside examiners were very positive, with Richard McKeon of Columbia University suggesting in 1932, "[t]o judge by the examinations of the sixteen students who appeared before me, I can think of no more effective course in collegiate education than that which resulted in the training of those students." Similarly, Stringfellow Barr of the University of Virginia observed, "I can hardly overstate my admiration for the intellectual poise with

164. Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, May 11, 1988, p. 3, *Oral History Program*.

165. The list of readings for the General Honors course is in *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 38, folder 5.

which your students have taken hold.”¹⁶⁶ The College Curriculum Committee eventually voted to allow students to use the final examination in this course as a substitute for one of the elective sequences beyond the general education survey courses that each Chicago undergraduate was required to take under the New Plan.

Mortimer Adler’s arrival on campus had hardly been fortuitous, since Hutchins’s failed attempt to impose him (as well as Scott Buchanan of the University of Virginia) during the 1929–30 academic year on the Department of Philosophy as an associate professor was a political disaster.¹⁶⁷ By early 1931, when Chauncey Boucher was organizing the teams to plan the new general education courses, he wrote candidly to Hutchins that “[n]early every day I encounter an expression of distrust or fear regarding the selection of men to be put in charge of the four general divisional courses provided in the report of the Curriculum Committee—namely, that Mr. Adler will be put in charge of the humanities course, and that others of his ilk will be brought in for the other courses. In each instance I think I have convinced the person that such fears are unwarranted.”¹⁶⁸ Little did Boucher know what lay ahead.

166. McKeon to Hutchins, June 12, 1932, and Barr to Hutchins, June 15, 1931, *ibid.*

167. The events were described in detail in “A Statement from The Department of Philosophy,” [1930], *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 106, folder 14. See also Amy A. Kass, “Radical Conservatives for Liberal Education,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1973), 108–118; and Hutchins to Adler, November 11, 1929, December 4, 1929, and January 30, 1930, *Adler Papers*, Box 56. McKeon’s name was also on the list, making up what Hutchins called the “holy trinity.” *Ibid.*, January 30, 1930. Adler later provided his own account of the fiasco in his *Philosopher at Large. An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York, 1977), pp. 129–130, 145–148.

168. Boucher to Hutchins, March 3, 1931, *PP, 1925–1945*, Box 106, folder 14.

Adler proved a potent influence on Hutchins. They had first met in 1927 when Hutchins was at Yale Law School, and he engaged Adler on a project in the study of the logic of evidence in the law on the recommendation of the British philosopher C. K. Ogden.¹⁶⁹ Adler's first book, *Dialectic*, was about to be published under Ogden's auspices. This book, and many of Adler's other writings of the 1930s, already have the encyclopedic and Aristotelian character that later became identified as Adler's Thomism.¹⁷⁰ *Dialectic* ranges over the history of Western philosophy in pursuit of a taxonomic ordering of kinds of inquiry. Adler claimed, "Dialectic is a convenient technical name for the kind of thinking which takes place when human beings enter into dispute. . . . It is presented here as a methodology significantly different from the procedure of the empirical scientist or . . . the mathematician. It is an intellectual process in which all men engage in so far as they undertake to be critical of their own opinions, or the opinions of others."¹⁷¹ Adler distinguishes throughout the book between theoretical sciences (the traditional branches of philosophy) and the modern empirical sciences. He thinks of his inquiry as identifying an overarching methodology for all science since "in so far as any science achieves theoretical form, its universe of discourse has dialectical structure."¹⁷² As early

169. Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, pp. 107–110; Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins. Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 88–108.

170. For example, *What Man Has Made of Man* (New York, 1937), a series of lectures on philosophical psychology, and *An Analysis of the Kinds of Knowledge* (1935), an outline of epistemology ranging from Aristotle and Euclid through Galileo and Newton to modern empirical social science, which was circulated in mimeograph through the University of Chicago Bookstore.

171. Mortimer Adler, *Dialectic* (New York, 1927), p. v.

172. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

as 1927, then, Adler was trying to provide a theoretical framework for the kinds of discussions that were already taking place in Erskine's "General Honors" course at Columbia. His philosophical writings at Chicago and his teaching with Hutchins carry this work forward, and Hutchins's later juxtaposition of theoretical ideas (which were good) against empirical facts (which were not) flowed directly from the influence of Adler's conceptual frameworks. It is natural that Adler found the work of St. Thomas Aquinas attractive, since Thomas's *Summae* provide a model for both the encyclopedic treatment of philosophical problems and the engagement with all accessible traditional learning that Adler found attractive.¹⁷³ In Adler, Hutchins found a man nearly his own age who possessed substantial learning, contentious eloquence, and profound intellectual ambition. It was a natural collaboration. Both men aspired to traditional philosophical learning of great seriousness and scope, and both men, for better or worse, aspired to remake the institutions of the University in the pursuit of that ideal.

The Adler-Hutchins "Great Books" course, which Adler conceived as a radical alternative to the kind of curriculum that Chauncey Boucher had instituted in 1931, was one ongoing challenge to the New Plan. Indeed, the glowing evaluations about his "Great Books" course that Hutchins received from men like McKeon and Barr must have had a powerful impact in motivating him to think beyond the curricular structures of the New Plan. A second challenge came forward in 1933 in the person of Ronald Crane, a respected professor of English who initiated discussions in the fall of 1933 about restructuring the curriculum in a way that would privilege humanistic courses at the expense of the natural

173. Adler makes the case for linking his work with Aquinas's in his 1938 Aquinas Lecture at Marquette University, *Saint Thomas and the Gentiles* (Milwaukee, 1938).

sciences.¹⁷⁴ Crane also generated considerable controversy in the spring of 1934 by writing a memorandum impugning the intellectual ambitions of the Department of History. The memorandum arose from a specific set of issues unrelated to the New Plan—the decision of the Department of History to associate itself with the Division of the Social Sciences for administrative purposes in January 1933, which caused considerable unhappiness among faculty in the humanities¹⁷⁵—but one of Crane’s arguments about the need for greater clarity as to who was responsible for history and who in fact was an historian was his assertion that “it has come to be widely assumed among professional historians that their proper domain is coextensive with the history of culture or civilization, and that they ought to give increasing attention in their teaching and writing to subject matters, such as economics, philosophy, science, and even art which are already organized elsewhere in the University as special historical disciplines.” In Crane’s mind, political and social history were the legitimate province of the “professional historians,” but other domains of historical inquiry and teaching should properly be left to experts in the relevant substantive fields. Since History was Chauncey Boucher’s home department, and since two prominent historians—Ferdinand Schevill and Arthur Scott—were the primary leaders of the humanities general education course that explicitly sought to go beyond political and social history to include

174. See John W. Boyer, *Three Views of Continuity and Change at the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 50–53.

175. “Minutes of the Department of History, January 13, 1933,” *Department of History Records*, Box 19, folder 6; “Minutes of the University Senate,” March 11, 1933.

literature, art, and philosophy, Crane's intervention could also be seen as a further covert challenge to Boucher and the New Plan.¹⁷⁶

As his contacts with Adler and Crane grew more intense, Hutchins drifted away from whatever superficial commitment to the New Plan he had had in 1931. This shift is apparent in Hutchins's confidential report to the Board of Trustees in early 1935, where he observed of the New Plan that

[o]nly the four general courses can be called attempts to give a general education. They are barely half the ordinary student's work. The rest of his time he spends in specialization, which by the legislation is the task of the Divisions, and in "tool" subjects, which he should take only if he is going on into the Divisions. The curriculum is seriously over weighted on the side of the natural sciences. Two divisions of natural science are necessary for administrative purposes; it does not follow that two natural science courses are necessary for a general education. A serious result is that the Fine Arts are squeezed out or almost out of the curriculum. . . . The curriculum would be much better if there were a general course in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the fine arts, philosophy, and history. The difficulties

176. R. S. Crane, "The Organization of History in a University," April 1934, and the History Department's response, "The Objectives of a Department of History," June 1934, are filed in *ibid.*, Box 25, folder 3. In his response to Crane's report, Boucher cleverly urged that the conditions that Crane identified should lead the Department of History to urge its graduate students to take more courses in specialty departments, not fewer, and thus gain greater professional preparation in order to do history of a broad interdisciplinary nature. See Boucher to H. F. MacNair, May 4, 1934, *ibid.*

with such an arrangement are (1) that we have no adequate staff in the fine arts and (2) it might be hard to get those who teach the present courses to vote to change them. The whole course of study suffers greatly from a disease that afflicts all college teaching in America, the information disease. I have never favored survey courses in the usual sense. A hasty look at all the facts in a given field does not seem very useful from any but a conversational point of view. I hoped that the general courses would deal with the leading ideas in the various fields of knowledge. Although some progress has been made in this direction, the great weakness of the curriculum is still its emphasis on current information.

Hutchins then continued, "I believe that departmental courses of all kinds should be excluded from a general education. I am sure, too, that a college course which is based largely on the reading of great books, with lectures on them and discussions of them, is more likely to produce understanding, even of the contemporary world, than a vast mass of current data."¹⁷⁷

These tensions came to a head in 1934 and 1935, when the New Plan sustained a series of public collisions, the like of which the University had never before experienced, at least in the case of undergraduate education. At the December Convocation of the University in late 1933, Robert Hutchins opened a rhetorical battlefield by denouncing those who would inundate the young with facts as opposed to concepts in undergraduate teaching: "The gadgeteers and the data-collectors, masquerading as scientists, have threatened to become the supreme chieftains

177. *Report of the President, 1930–1934*, February 1, 1935, pp. 21–22.

of the scholarly world.” In contrast, the University should really be a “center of rational thought,” which was the “only basis of education and research.” The current system of education was unfortunately designed “to pour facts into the student with splendid disregard of the certainty that he will forget them, that they may not be facts by the time he graduates, and that he won’t know what to do with them if they are. . . . The three worst words in education are ‘character’, ‘personality’, and ‘facts’. Facts are the core of an anti-intellectual curriculum.” Instead of collecting evidence, the “gaze of the University should be turned toward ideas,” which would “promote understanding of the nature of the world and of man.”¹⁷⁸ Hutchins continued this theme in early January 1934 at the annual Trustee-faculty dinner where he insisted, “I have attempted to show that facts are not science and that the collection of facts will not make a science; that scientific research, therefore, cannot consist of the accumulation of data alone; that the anti-intellectual account of science given by scientists has produced unfortunate effects on the work of other disciplines which wished to be scientific; and that our anti-intellectual scheme of education, resulting in large part from this anti-intellectual account, was misconceived and incapable of accomplishing the objects set for it by its sponsors.” He further attacked those University teachers who “offend us in filling their students full of facts, in putting them through countless measurements, in multiplying their courses, in insisting that they must have more of the students’ time so that they can give him more information.”¹⁷⁹

178. The speech garnered the attention of the local press. See Edgar Ansel Mowrer, “Hutchins Stirs University by Questioning Science as a Basis for Philosophy,” *Chicago Daily News*, December 27, 1933, p. 5.

179. Both speeches were later published in Robert M. Hutchins, *No Friendly Voice* (Chicago, 1936), pp. 24–40.

The discursive framework that Hutchins deployed—"ideas" as being more important than "facts" and learning more important than memorizing—was highly simplistic and betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding about the way in which modern scientific research was conducted, but it afforded a fascinating stance with which to take the moral high ground, accusing universities of a thoughtless disregard for the truly essential features of the mission of liberal education.

Hutchins's discursive bravado, which could be read as targeting either the New Plan courses directly or at least impugning the curricular imagination of the faculty who had organized them, gave encouragement to the then editor of the *Maroon*, a young undergraduate by the name of John Barden, to launch a frontal assault on the New Plan. Barden was a New Plan student with a relatively modest academic record (he had received C's in his comprehensive exams).¹⁸⁰ Barden had met Mortimer Adler when he audited the Hutchins-Adler "General Honors" course and also enrolled in the fall of 1933 in Adler's class on "Law in Western European Intellectual History." Barden quickly fell under Adler's intellectual sway.¹⁸¹

In early January 1934, Barden wrote an editorial in which he slammed Chauncey Boucher's New Plan curriculum as purveying facts and not ideas: "[I]f we assume that a general education does consist of a collection of ideas rather than a collection of facts, the new plan is not

180. Frank H. Knight to Walter B. Smith, December 7, 1934, *Frank H. Knight Papers*, Box 62, folder 2.

181. See Barden's use of the Adler-Hutchins "Great Books" course as a model for a future curriculum in the College in the *Maroon*, March 8, 1934, p. 2. For Adler's subsequent account of these events, see his *Philosopher at Large*, pp. 149–190.

administering a general education.”¹⁸² Barden continued this theme in weekly commentaries throughout the Winter and Spring Quarters of 1934. Barden’s critiques of the New Plan as providing facts and not ideas might be said to have the appearance of farce, given the heavy theoretical superstructures offered by Gideonse *et al.*, but his real target seems to have been the New Plan’s basic assumption that scholarly professionalism and current research should inform the teaching of general education. He seemed to have a clear bias against the natural sciences and against the structure of the comprehensive exams that tested a student’s mastery of such research. In a subsequent essay, in the form of a dialogue between Socrates and Exercon on the ideal of the University, Barden portrayed Socrates as arguing with refined irony that “many people believe that general education consists of exposition of the latest results of modern research.”¹⁸³ Barden also attacked the New Plan lectures as mainly recounting facts that could easily be obtained in textbooks.¹⁸⁴ Instead of teaching “great” general ideas based on original sources that were presumably easily accessible to an undergraduate, faculty members were presenting highly technical courses based on advanced research in which students were overwhelmed with empirical data before any larger syntheses could be offered.

Within a month of Barden’s initial attacks and Hutchins’s speeches, the student biology club, Alpha Zeta Beta, invited Mortimer Alder and Anton J. Carlson to a public debate in Mandel Hall before seven hundred students on February 9, 1934, on the theme of facts versus ideas. This

182. *Maroon*, January 5, 1934, p. 2.

183. *Ibid.*, January 9, 1934, p. 2.

184. *Ibid.*, February 20, 1934, p. 2.

uproarious event consisted of Carlson taking the stage and reading a series of propositions defending the scientific method, followed by Adler's witty and ironic replies that defended Hutchins's ideas as coherent and reasonable and, by implication, criticized Carlson's presentation as an example of the obfuscations of a kind of scientific research that seemed to deny the importance of conceptual abstractions in the articulation of the scientific method.¹⁸⁵

Emboldened by Adler's rhetorical brinksmanship, Barden commissioned four College seniors to write critiques of the four general survey courses in March 1934, based on their published syllabi. Because they had matriculated in 1930, the four essay writers were studying under the requirements of the old curriculum, and none of them had actually taken any of the New Plan general education courses. What they had in common was that all four had been students in the Hutchins-Adler "Great Books" class, which in effect had become a rival general education course based on very different intellectual principles. Janet Kalven attacked the humanities course as being a course in intellectual history offered by nonphilosophers, when, to her mind, only philosophers were competent to undertake such an assignment. Kalven claimed to find many "offenses against sound scholarship" in the organization of the course. Particularly offensive for Kalven was the course's cavalier treatment of Plato and Aristotle in that the syllabus suggested that there were

185. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1934, p. 1. Carlson had denounced Hutchins's views in a newspaper interview in late December 1933, insisting that "[t]he particularly disturbing element in the present instance is that it comes from the president of a university whose main distinction has come from its achievements in science." Gifford Ernest, "Fact-Finding of Science Defended by Dr. Carlson; Denies Charges of Hutchins," *Chicago Daily News*, December 28, 1933, p. 8. Adler's notes for the February 1934 debate are in the *Adler Papers*, Box 57.

important differences between the thought of these two philosophers, where Kalven insisted they were tightly bound by similar theories of man and reason. In all, the humanities syllabus was “sophistical, dogmatic, anti-intellectual, inaccurate, misleading, inconsistent, sentimental, and slovenly.” James Martin criticized the social sciences course as being filled with covert ideas of Comtean positivism, the theoretical structure of which he proceeded to critique. Ignoring most of the actual material taught in the course, Martin then opined that the course as a whole was based on “bad scholarship.” Darwin Anderson thought that the physical sciences course suffered from too heavy a reliance on evolutionary theory and “mechanistic” theories of the origins of the universe, and urged that the course spend more time investigating the “fundamental principles of natural philosophy.” Finally, Clarice Anderson attacked the biological sciences course as having a “mechanistic bias” and as being too dependent on evolutionary frameworks, and she then spent the rest of her essay explicating Aristotle’s theory of human nature and its relevance for modern science.¹⁸⁶

The four critiques were gratuitous, poorly argued, and naive, and other College students who were enrolled in the New Plan courses quickly mounted a counteroffensive.¹⁸⁷ One such pro-New Plan student, Marie Berger, gathered 250 signatures on a petition accusing Barden of conducting an authoritarian crusade that was divorced from the majority of student opinion. Berger pointed out that the four writers had no exposure to the courses they were writing about with such negativity, and that this was an unfair method by which to proceed.¹⁸⁸

186. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1934, pp. 1, 3, 5–6.

187. *Ibid.*, April 11, 1934, pp. 1–4.

188. *Ibid.*, March 14, 1934, p. 2.

The attacks in the *Maroon* clearly got under Chauncey Boucher's skin. Boucher thought that Barden was a "smart aleck" who had demonstrated "bad taste." Stunned by the negative publicity generated by the *Maroon*, Boucher had the College Curriculum Committee issue a memorandum denouncing the recent criticisms of the New Plan as the work of "rationalistic absolutism which brings with it an atmosphere of intolerance of liberal, scientific, and democratic attitudes" that was "incompatible with the ideal of a community of scholars and students recognizable as the University of Chicago."¹⁸⁹ Upon receiving a copy of this statement, Barden then wrote an ironic, but deeply insulting, letter to Boucher, wondering why Boucher would have taken the views of students in the *Maroon* so seriously and adding, "I don't care how good or bad a college newspaper may be, it is *never* worth official notice by any division of the faculty. I feel that the College faculty have immeasurably degraded themselves by officially recognizing *The Daily Maroon* even exists."¹⁹⁰ What Barden failed to appreciate, of course, was that Boucher's real worry was that Robert Hutchins not only agreed with the attacks, but that Adler and he had encouraged the students to press them.

The debate about facts versus ideas had a fascinating afterwash among the faculty from the Department of Economics. Harry Gideonse kept a poster board outside his office in Cobb Hall filled with clippings from the *Maroon*, to which he added derisive commentaries, that were displayed for students to see. More importantly, Gideonse submitted a commentary to the *Maroon* in June 1934 asserting that Adler and his followers were "pathic and pathetic" in their search for "certainty" in

189. "The Educational Objectives of the College in the University of Chicago," April 21, 1934, *PP*, 1925–1945, Box 19a, folder 3.

190. Barden to Boucher, May 3, 1934, *Adler Papers*, Box 56.

knowledge and values, presenting themselves as a group of “tired young men [who] are rejecting the tentative groping for truth that is characteristic of modern science.”¹⁹¹ Frank H. Knight, who was a voluble and assertive personality and not easily intimidated, also entered the fray with a strident attack on Adler’s alleged medievalism, accusing those who would attack modern thought (like, presumably, Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins) of engaging in “absolutistic verbalism,” “‘wish-thinking’ as a substitute for truth,” and “intellectual dictatorship.” Throwing Thomism in the same class of “isms” as Marxism, Knight insisted that both were “social reform propaganda,” and that “Neither society nor any group or class in it can be an intellectual community unless we begin with an overwhelming presumption against the soundness of any teaching whose promoters cannot place themselves above suspicion of motivation by other interests than love of truth and right. Between advocating and truth-seeking, meaning the quest of right answers to problems, there is a nearly *impassable* gulf.”¹⁹²

After trying to publish his broadside, “Is Modern Thought Anti-Intellectual?” in the *Maroon* where Barden torpedoed it, Knight sent it in samizdat fashion to various key faculty leaders around campus.¹⁹³ He

191. Harry D. Gideonse, “The New War of Science and Dogma,” *Maroon*, June 7, 1934, p. 2.

192. “Is Modern Thought Anti-Intellectual?,” *Knight Papers*, Box 61, folder 22. It was eventually published in the *University of Chicago Magazine*, November 1934, pp. 20–23, with Knight complaining about the *Maroon*’s refusal to print it.

193. “I am sure Adler wouldn’t get to first base, or six inches from home plate, if he had to stand on his own feet, but if the President’s public utterances and general conduct mean anything at all the thing is really a serious menace. If a leading university jumps for medievalism as a cure for the perplexities of modern life and thought, then the human race deserves to be drowned in something besides water.” Knight to Beardsley Ruml, June 23, 1934, *ibid*.

sent it to Chauncey Boucher with the comment that “the very sources of intellectual integrity are being systematically poisoned in the University as a whole. . . . Of course we cannot be absolutely sure how far the President is backing the rankest kind of empty and bigoted verbalism and encouragement to dogmatism on the part of the most incompetent, but the evidence seems to me overwhelmingly for conviction. . . . [I]t seems to me impossible to believe that the President is not consciously conniving at, if not deliberately pushing, the whole uproar.”¹⁹⁴ Chauncey Boucher responded, “I *know* how much real genius the College Faculty members have shown in the immense amount of work they have done with verve and enthusiasm to design and administer what I *know* to be the best College program in the country. A Dean who would remain passive and not turn his hand to save this glorious achievement from being wrecked, would not be worth the powder to blow him to Hell.”¹⁹⁵ Boucher also insisted, “If the Faculty will but stick together and present a nearly united front, they can ‘get’ any damned Dean or even a President who can be shown to be a nuisance rather than an aid.” It says much about how dispiriting the situation had become for the first Core organizers that their putative leader and the real architect of the New Plan, Chauncey Boucher, expressed himself in such strident, but also humiliating terms.

The dispute also found its way into the sanctums of the Department of History, where the historians found themselves on the defensive after a memo was written by Ronald Crane. Crane would later turn against Hutchins, but in 1934 he included himself along with Adler and

194. Knight to Boucher, July 28, 1934, *ibid.*, Box 58, folder 6.

195. Boucher to Knight, July 31, 1934, *ibid.*

Hutchins as working in common on behalf of “our educational ends.”¹⁹⁶ Even before Crane’s broadside, the nervous chairman of the Department of History, Bernadotte Schmitt, who felt that his department was particularly exposed in the context of Hutchins’s attack on fact mongering, circularized his colleagues with a memo arguing that their graduate courses might be seen to be too fact oriented and urging them to restructure them to be more “interpretative and integrating.”¹⁹⁷ Schmitt met with opposition from his fellows, and soon had to back down.¹⁹⁸

The spring of 1935 then brought a wholly different kind of challenge. The Walgreen Affair has been the subject of another of my essays, and I will not repeat that story here.¹⁹⁹ But it is worth remembering that the context for Lucille Norton’s accusations that she had been taught pro-communist doctrines at the College and manipulated to embrace communism was the fact that she was a student in the social sciences general education course taught by Harry Gideonse. Once her uncle, Charles Walgreen, had made his accusation, and made it publicly, the University community and Robert Hutchins found themselves caught up in the circus-like atmosphere of a Red-scare. Walgreen and the Hearst press that manipulated Walgreen tried to tar a number of individuals at

196. Crane to Adler, July 31, 1934, *Adler Papers*, Box 56.

197. Memorandum of Bernadotte E. Schmitt, January 29, 1934, *Department of History Records*, Box 25, folder 3. Ironically, the kind of courses that Schmitt wanted on the graduate level was already present in Schevill’s humanities general course in the College.

198. *William T. Hutchinson Diary*, entries of February 14, 1934, and February 19, 1934.

199. John W. Boyer, *Academic Freedom and the Modern University. The Experience of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 42–66.

the University, but among the central players in the end were Norton's teachers in "Social Sciences I," Harry Gideonse and Louis Wirth. Gideonse volunteered to testify before the Illinois Senate Committee investigating the case, and he used his testimony as an opportunity not only to rebut Walgreen's accusations directly—he proudly reported that of the 5,987 pages of reading that a student was expected to do in "Social Sciences I," less than 1 percent had anything to do with communism, and that about three thousand pages were related to American governmental institutions—but he also denounced "the entire trend toward collectivism—whether of a Fascist or Communist sort—with the gravest concern." Gideonse insisted that it was the responsibility of a university to provide its students with opportunities to debate current controversies "in light of established facts and critical scholarship."²⁰⁰ For anyone familiar with Gideonse's confrontation with Barden the year before, and with Frank Knight's denunciation of intellectual authoritarianism on campus, Gideonse's choice of words would not have been lost on the University audience. That Robert Hutchins found himself in the ironically frustrating situation of defending Gideonse's right to teach the *Communist Manifesto*, and that he did so eloquently and unflinchingly, says something about Hutchins's own core values.

The Walgreen controversy preoccupied students in the College and led to various statements that allowed students to mobilize the critical reading and writing skills that they had been taught in the New Plan's survey courses. One young woman, who was a friend of Lucille Norton, wrote a paper on the affair entitled "The 'Ism Witch Scare'," in which she insisted that Harry Gideonse was a "self-styled pro-capitalist

200. Testimony of Harry D. Gideonse, May 24, 1935, pp. 122–129, here 125–126, *Laird Bell Papers*, Box 8, folder 8.

conservative” who could hardly be accused of purveying communism to Chicago undergraduates. But, in her view, what Gideonse’s course did do was to expose students to a range of views about the American political and economic system, which she found healthy: “If persons in college are not sufficiently mature to think about the possibilities of government other than American, when will they be? . . . If we cannot think freely, discuss freely, and study freely all manner of social organization or disorganization in the universities where every possible opportunity for finding the truth is made available, where shall we go? . . . [t]he University does not teach subversive doctrines. They do not advocate an unquestioning acceptance of any principle of government. They are attempting to teach intelligent criticism of government and economic philosophies so that we may more wisely work toward an American Utopia, accepting that which advances the cause, rejecting that which retards.” She concluded by noting, “I hope I have succeeded in conveying the impression that we freshmen are not so immature that we cannot think for ourselves.”²⁰¹

Harry Gideonse had played a minor part in the Barden-*Maroon* fiasco, but his role as a leader of the disloyal opposition to Robert Hutchins grew rapidly after 1934. Maynard Krueger later insisted that Gideonse was “the chief vocal leader of an opposition to Hutchins,” not in the least because he was respected by the faculty of physical sciences and the biological sciences.²⁰² He became the preeminent spokesman for what

201. Alda M. Luebbe, “This ‘Ism Witch Scare’.” Mary Gilson sent a copy of this paper to Aaron Brumbaugh on December 23, 1938, with the comment that “She told me she gave Mr. Walgreen a copy. Not bad for an 18 year old girl, is it?” *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 7.

202. Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, May 25, 1988, p. 13.

Krueger called the “anti-Hutchins position” on the faculty of the later 1930s.²⁰³ Harry Gideonse was first brought to the attention of the Department of Economics by William Ogburn, who had known him during the years he spent at Columbia University in New York. Gideonse was hired in early 1930 to coordinate the department’s undergraduate program, but within a year of his coming he was offered the opportunity to become the coordinator of the College’s new social sciences general courses created in 1931. Although hired as an associate professor, he was not given a tenured appointment, and this fact soon became crucial in the drama that eventually played itself out. When Gideonse was first proposed for an appointment by the Department of Economics in 1930, the then chair, Harry Millis, noted that “[a]t twenty-nine he is not a real economist and he may never become an economist of the first rank. He is, however, an excellent teacher, a natural leader, and a real personality. He seems to be able to draw the line neatly between what is good for and effective with young people, and what is not, and has had interesting and varied experience and background for one of his years. . . . Of course, the appointment of a young man, especially to function as in this case, is

203. “I stayed in close touch with him all the rest of his life. I always thought of him as more nearly an Englishman than an American, despite the fact that I knew he was Dutch. He was on the liberal side of all social economic questions and he regarded what he understood to be the Hutchins position—and what I understood the Hutchins position, also—as a view of educational content that was against the modern and back toward the utterly classical content. While Gideonse, in prescribing reading lists for courses in the College, made some considerable amount of classical formulations, he didn’t regard himself as having any intention of becoming a captive of that view. That position of his was very quickly appreciated by the people of rather high standing here in both the Biological and the Physical Sciences. . . . In fact, he was more nearly a spokesman for the anti-Hutchins position than anybody in the Physical or Biological Sciences.” Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, April 28, 1988, p. 5.



Harry Gideonse, circa 1935.

more or less of an experiment, and involves a certain amount of risk. It is partly for that reason that I recommend a three-year contract.” Hutchins approved the appointment, but with the discouraging proviso, “ok if the Department understands they may be choosing this as [against] a ‘great economist.’”²⁰⁴

In October 1935, Gideonse rejected calls that he and his colleagues make the social sciences course more “integrated” and systematic. To Aaron Brumbaugh he pointed out,

204. See Millis to Woodward, January 23, 1930, *PP, 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 25, folder 5.

[t]o call a group of related disciplines the division of the *social sciences* does not create *a* social science, any more than the creation of the division of the *humanities* creates *a* humanity. The term “social science” is a mistranslation of the German “sozial-wissenschaft” which is correctly translated as “*knowledge* about society” rather than as social *science*. A first year course in social sciences (we call it “introduction to the study of contemporary society” in our syllabus) is therefore not comparable to a first-year course in the physical sciences. . . . I think my colleagues would join me in saying that if at any time any one should be able to persuade a committee chosen from a list of representative members of the Division (say, for instance, Redfield, Merriam, Viner, Ogburn, Millis, Wright, Knight, etc.) of the general validity of any principles of “systematic social science” not now taught in our College work, we shall cheerfully accept their findings and introduce these “principles.” As it stands, “systematic social science” is a figment of uninformed imagination in so far as it extends beyond the boundaries of what is now taught in the introductory courses.²⁰⁵

Gideonse continued by insisting that “[t]he function of the college is to teach in the best possible manner the results of the best established scholarship. It is not its function to teach material that is utterly unacceptable to representative scholarship and in many respects antithetical to its dominant tendencies.”

Nor was Gideonse alone in these views. They were consistently shared by his colleagues. Maynard Krueger later remembered, “In the

205. Gideonse to Brumbaugh, October 31, 1935, p. 5, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 2.

social sciences there was never a time, from the time Harry Gideonse came here, from the time the staff was organized, when the Great Books would have got any votes in that staff. Now, that doesn't mean they were against good books, but it did mean that they did not propose to be captured by something that they regarded with very great suspicion. The concept of the Great Books . . . was a concept that had a great deal of disrespect amongst members of the faculty."²⁰⁶

Gideonse followed his rejoinder to Brumbaugh a year later with an essay in October 1936 in *Social Studies* where he took up the issue of the pervasive search for systems of certainty in contemporary intellectual and political practice, ranging from "the absolutism of fascism to that of communism, and cover[ing] in its broad sweep the curious antics of those who have found a 'Road Back' by retiring to the 'rational order' of Aristotle and St. Thomas of Aquinas." In the context of the American academy, Gideonse saw this trend as a kind of radical counterpoint to the destruction of the old classics-based educational system of the nineteenth century. Having given itself over to "freedom of election," the academy now found itself surrounded by those who proffered easy and comfortable solutions to restore holistic order via ideological prescriptions and theoretical syntheses drawn from the distant past. Gideonse did not deny the need for overcoming the disjointedness of modern knowledge, but he insisted that this chaos could only be overcome by embracing modern thought and modern science on their own terms and seeking problem-oriented solutions drawn from the new knowledge of the various disciplines. Rather than training "fixed persons for fixed duties" with incantations of past dogmas, it was the obligation of the modern college to educate

206. Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, May 11, 1988, pp. 30–31.

flexible minds who would see through the allures and temptations of the “systems.” Gideonse argued that

the clamor for a rational order, for a comprehensive set of first principles with “due subordination” of historical and current empirical material selected with an eye to illustration or confirmation of metaphysics, is essentially a claim to intellectual dictatorship. . . . The tide of increasing specialized knowledge will continue to run, metaphysical or administrative Canutes to the contrary notwithstanding. . . . Our basic problem is not that of improved *means* to unimproved *ends*, but rather that *means* are ever more available to *ends* ever more muddled and evanescent. Philosophy’s most tempting opportunity lies in the clarification and statement of the values by which we live, and such a clarification of values will spring from a detailed and synthetic knowledge of the conditioning *means* rather than from sterile parroting of the stale metaphysics of the past.²⁰⁷

Gideonse also tangled with the powerful chair of the Department of Education (and general supporter of Robert Hutchins), Charles Judd, who denounced the first-year social sciences course as taking up “in far too great detail many of the intricate problems of economics” and as conceiving “of the organization of society as determined by the forces which have brought about the Industrial Revolution.”²⁰⁸ Judd believed

207. Harry D. Gideonse, “Integration of the Social Sciences and the Quest for Certainty,” *The Social Studies*, 27 (1936): 371–372.

208. Charles Judd, “Memorandum on the Curriculum,” p. 4, *Division of the Social Sciences Records*, Box 16.

that Gideonse's essay in *Social Studies* smacked of intolerance of rival views and insisted that "[y]ou go out of your way, as it seems to me, from time to time to combat the people who have ideas that are not in agreement with your own. I am accustomed to thinking of discussions of the curriculum as objective rather than partisan. I have never been able to understand how some of you who are students of society ignore so completely the social elements which enter into university and school organizations."²⁰⁹ Gideonse responded angrily that "[t]o me and my colleagues [your] letter was disconcerting evidence of the extent to which even people on our own campus can put forward opinions and statements of fact about the work of their colleagues that have no more relation to reality than the views of some critics of higher education outside the universities."²¹⁰ Judd's criticism of Gideonse's efforts was part of a larger critique of the New Plan's links to the faculty of the divisions, as well as the quiet aversion that many New Plan leaders felt toward collaboration with the University High School. In 1937, Judd complained about the "obstructions which have been encountered *all along* in coordinating the instructional program of the new college unit with the work of the lower schools. . . . The College curriculum departs from the ideal curriculum for general education because it is determined in its organization by the fact that the University has four Divisions—an organization which was set up to serve the purposes of specialization of advanced students and the purposes of research. That the divisional organization should reach down and determine general education and control the courses given in the period of general education is a calamity."²¹¹

209. Judd to Gideonse, October 22, 1936, *PP*, 1925–1945, Box 102, folder 2.

210. Gideonse to Judd, November 20, 1936, *ibid.*

211. Judd to Brumbaugh, June 1, 1937, *Archive of the College*, Box 19, folder 7.

Harry Gideonse's trenchant opposition to Robert Hutchins doomed his career at Chicago. By early 1935, Hutchins had decided that he wanted to force Harry Gideonse off the faculty, telling Chauncey Boucher that he had informed Gideonse that he was "not prepared to say that we should increase his salary as the income of the University improves or to assure him that he would be placed on permanent tenure."²¹² In the spring of 1936, the Department of Economics sought to make good on their initial commitment to Gideonse that he would be offered tenure and a full professorship, and formally recommended such to Hutchins. Hutchins rejected the proposal out of hand. In July 1936, the full professors of the department then sent a respectful but forceful plea to Hutchins to reverse his decision, but Hutchins would not bend. The department insisted that Gideonse had been hired to be a superb teacher of college-level economics and had been assured that distinguished teaching, rather than research, would be the primary qualification used to measure his future advancement and promotions. Now, exactly the opposite had happened, and this from a President who claimed to be interested in quality undergraduate teaching. The writers worried greatly that Hutchins action was motivated by his personal dislike of Gideonse, because of Gideonse's opposition to Hutchins. They strongly hoped that this was not the case; "Mr. Gideonse's views on educational policies to be followed in the College may have differed in some respects from yours, and, in accordance with the tradition of academic freedom which has always prevailed at the University and to which you have given many magnificent services, he may not have hesitated to express himself on these matters. . . . If the impression should once gain ground that those who

212. Hutchins to Boucher, February 23, 1935, *PP, 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 25, folder 8.

freely objected to administrative policies were denied promotion, strong men would slowly leave the University and only the weaker and less courageous would remain. We know that this is the last thing you really want.”²¹³ This letter was all the more remarkable, as Richard McKeon noted in a confidential advisory to Hutchins, since it manifested the “singular unanimity of a group of men who seldom agree about anything.”²¹⁴

So disturbed was Frank Knight about the Gideonse case that he drafted a long denunciation of Hutchins’s behavior in a seven-page, single-spaced letter to Oskar Lange, as a kind of warning about the state of the University when Lange was considering a professorial appointment at Chicago. For Knight, the Gideonse case was prime evidence of Hutchins’s assault on the local faculty by using a kind of authoritarian medievalism: “he has only contempt for the opposition, which he treats as either incompetent or selfishly motivated, or both, and he seems to prefer to express this attitude in frankly insulting terms. . . . in so far as he does have any one view, or direction to ride off in, it is pretty clearly the aim of establishing the closest possible imitation of medieval scholasticism. And I am naturally opposed to that. I am especially opposed to it, moreover, because of the individual who would (of course) be Pope. I don’t think educational theory in any proper sense is really at issue. It is a question of power.”²¹⁵ Lange, who was deeply familiar with the autocratic power of state ministries of education in Europe, must have been mildly

213. Chester W. Wright *et al.* to Hutchins, April 8, 1936; H. A. Millis *et al.* to Hutchins, July 17, 1936, *ibid.*

214. McKeon to Hutchins, July 29, 1936, *Robert M. Hutchins Papers, Addenda*, Box 92, folder 1.

215. Knight to Lange, January 14, 1938, *Knight Papers*, Box 60, folder 25.

amused by Knight's tale of woes, and he assured Knight, "I am not deterred by it from accepting the appointment offered. After my experience with the Polish universities and from what I know about the German universities (I mean here the German universities in pre-Nazi times) such cases as you describe seem only minor blots on a picture which is on the whole clear. The conditions in the Polish universities were such of constant interference, though not by the rectors who have no power, from all possible sides."²¹⁶

Having been rejected for promotion in 1936 and again in 1937, Gideonse decided to publish a scathing critique of Hutchins' various educational essays, especially Hutchins's *The Higher Learning in America* (which had been published in October 1936). Gideonse's final attack came in the aftermath of the controversial attempt of Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler to import Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr to create a Committee on the Liberal Arts at the University, whose mandate was (among other things) to think about how a "Great Books" curriculum might be planned at Chicago.²¹⁷ Hutchins toyed with the

216. Lange to Knight, January 30, 1938, *ibid.*

217. See Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, pp. 172–177. Adler reported to Mark Van Doren in January 1936 that there were "a number of other very definite indications that the College faculty were prepared to fight the President tooth and nail" which, according to Adler, "made Bob so sick at heart that he didn't know what to do. . . . The reason for the opposition of the College faculty is simple: you three guys are somehow related to me and to Bob, and that relation signifies that you are all Catholics, medievalist, scholastics, Aristotelians, and of course sons of bitches, if not of St. Benedict." Adler to Mark Van Doren, January 17, 1936, *Adler Papers*, Box 57. By the summer of 1937, Adler reported that "Chicago is hopeless. From now on, everything will be progressively McKeonized. That's my way of saying that poison is being sprayed on the tree of knowledge." Adler to R. Catesby Taliaferro, July 21, 1937, *ibid.* See also Amy A. Kass, "Radical Conservatives," pp. 135–155.

idea of imposing Barr as the new Dean of the College, even though he admitted to Adler that “[w]e all know that it is going to be hellish hard to put Winkie [Barr’s nickname] over as Dean.”²¹⁸ These tactics had raised deep opposition in the College and in the Division of the Humanities and may have contributed to Richard McKeon’s ultimate reservations about Adler’s schemes.²¹⁹ Gideonse and several others associated with the New Plan curriculum (Coulter, Scott, Schlesinger, Carlson, Keniston, and a few others) tried to produce a collaborative pamphlet critiquing Hutchins’s educational ideas as represented in Hutchins’s short book on *The Higher Learning in America* in the spring of 1937, but the strategy collapsed when several faculty got cold feet. Gideonse complained to Wirth that “the whole thing made me more sick at heart than anything that has happened this year.”²²⁰

Instead, Harry Gideonse decided to produce his own demarche. In a thirty-four page pamphlet called *The Higher Learning in a Democracy*, Gideonse excoriated Hutchins for the latter’s call for a new metaphysics that would bring intellectual and moral order to the chaos of American

218. Hutchins to Adler, September 8, 1936, as well as August 21, 1936, *Adler Papers*, Box 56.

219. See the “Minutes of the Faculty of the Division of the Humanities, May 8, 1937, and October 9, 1937.” Hutchins initially sought to have Barr appointed in the College, after vetting by the Department of History. Professor Harley MacNair was asked to poll the senior faculty in the department, and he reported that Stringfellow Barr was an “exceptionally pleasing person” but also that Barr “makes no pretense of scholarship or scholarly productivity in the sense in which those terms are understood at the University of Chicago.” MacNair to Brumbaugh, November 26, 1935, *Archive of the College*, Box 2, folder 11.

220. Gideonse to Wirth, April 13, 1937, *Louis Wirth Papers*, Box 4, folder 2. The drafts of several of the chapters are in the *Wirth Papers*, Box 51, folder 1.

university education, insisting that this was nothing short of imposing an “absolutistic system.”²²¹ Gideonse claimed that he was especially troubled by Hutchins’s alleged disrespect for modern science, and he argued that “Acceptance of the curricular primacy of a set of first metaphysical principles would reduce science to dogma and education to indoctrination. . . . [I]f these are times of confusion and disorder, the results and the methods of science also make them times of unparalleled promise. Now—as never before—educational leadership calls for a persistent and critical emphasis upon the significance of present achievement and its promise for the future.”²²² The pamphlet was sufficiently arresting that Hutchins asked Mortimer Adler to comment on it, which he promptly did, but Adler also sent Hutchins a separate letter in which he candidly noted that Gideonse had rich opportunities for intellectual subversion precisely because of Hutchins’s imprecise and vague use of words and concepts about “philosophy,” “metaphysics,” “knowledge of first principles,” and the like.²²³

221. “By constructing a university in this way it can be made intelligible. Metaphysics, the study of first principles pervades the whole. . . . I should insist that a university is concerned with thought and that the collection of information, historical or current, had no place in it except as such data may illustrate or confirm principles or assist in their development.” Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 108–109.

222. Harry D. Gideonse, *The Higher Learning in a Democracy. A Reply to President Hutchins’ Critique of the American University* (New York, 1937), pp. 9, 33. Gideonse further elaborated some of his ideas about the importance of educating what he characterized as the “whole man” in “Quality of Teaching or Content of Education?” in *The Preparation and In-Service Training of College Teachers. Proceedings of the Institute for Administrative Officers of Higher Institutions*, 10 (1938): 65–75.

223. “As I look back upon the last two or three years of effort in promulgating your educational ideas and policies, I can see the following main errors: (1) that

Coming from an untenured professor, Gideonse's attack on the President of the University was imprudent, but he may have realized that his chances for tenure at Chicago were already nil. The Department of Economics filed protests with Hutchins, citing Gideonse's extraordinary teaching and his intellectual prowess, but this was to no avail.²²⁴ When Gideonse finally resigned in the spring of 1938 to accept a professorship at Barnard College, Louis Wirth brought an unusual motion before the Faculty of the College recognizing Gideonse's many talents and contributions, and expressing great regret that he was leaving the University community:

His colleagues in the College deeply regret the departure of Mr. Gideonse from the campus of the University of Chicago. Through the many years of labor to establish the present organization, staff, and curriculum, he has generously and devotedly given of his wisdom, his enthusiasm, his energies, and his leadership. . . . We shall long remember with pleasure

unfortunate distinction between facts and ideas which has been misunderstood, because of the language, on all sides; (2) your use of "metaphysics" both in place of theology, on the one hand, and in place of philosophy, on the other; and in this connection the very bad phrase "knowledge of first principles"; (3) the unfortunate phrasing of your attack on "character training" which has been misunderstood as a failure on your part to take account of the moral virtues in education; (4) the failure to answer the questions, what philosophy or whose metaphysics, which, not satisfactorily answered, leaves everyone with the suspicion that you must absolutely mean Aristotelianism or something like it." Adler to Hutchins, June 25, 1937, *Adler Papers*, Box 56.

224. H. A. Millis to Hutchins, May 27, 1937, *PP*, 1925–1940, *Appointments and Budgets*, Box 25, folder 10; Millis to Brumbaugh, January 31, 1938, *ibid.*, Box 42, folder 10.

the democratic and effective manner in which he inspired the loyalty and comradely cooperation of his associates.²²⁵

The motion passed unanimously, with each of the sixty faculty members present rising to signify his or her personal approval. Most problematic was the failure of Aaron J. Brumbaugh, the Dean of the College, to support Gideonse strongly and unambiguously, but Brumbaugh was not a distinguished scholar and, in contrast to Boucher, he seemed eager to please or at least to accommodate Robert Hutchins.²²⁶ Gideonse's friends clearly felt him to be the victim of a political purge, and Hutchins's obfuscations to student protestors that he had never rejected a recommendation of the Deans that Gideonse be promoted, while technically correct (he rejected on several occasions a direct recommendation brought to him by the Department of Economics), sounded slightly threadbare. With Gideonse's departure, Hutchins had eliminated a formidable public intellectual with articulate views on liberal education—

225. "Minutes of the Faculty of the College," June 2, 1938, p. 1.

226. Brumbaugh reviewed the case in January 1938, and after admitting that Gideonse had done an effective job as a teacher remarked, "[I]f the terms of the original agreement [offered to Gideonse by the Department of Economics] were as stated above . . . it would seem that Mr. Gideonse should either be promoted now or should be given a definite indication as to the chances of his promotion in the near future." See Budget Narrative of the College for 1938–1939, January 29, 1938, *PP, 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 42, folders 5–6. Hutchins had little problem ignoring such a "judicious" nonrecommendation. Ralph Tyler later remembered that Brumbaugh was "an easy going, nice guy, who could say he believed in all the things Hutchins believed in, but was intellectually, in my opinion, too lazy to think through what that meant and how to do anything about it." Ralph W. Tyler, *Education: Curriculum Development and Evaluation. An Interview Conducted with Malca Chall in 1985, 1986, 1987* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 160.

a man who had the rhetorical skills, the courage, and the capacity for leadership to challenge Hutchins on his own terms.²²⁷ Given that the other senior founding members of the 1931 general education courses were either disillusioned or distracted, and given that the College could only drift with a weak Dean in charge of its affairs in the later 1930s, the way slowly opened for the revolution of January 1942.

The logic of the curricular legislation of January 1942, which effectively eliminated the departments and their majors from the undergraduate curriculum, was fiercely opposed by many senior faculty members with experiences in the New Plan. For men like Schlesinger, Wirth, and Scott, the issue was not, as the proponents of the all-general education college would later try to argue, of rote memorization in the 1930s survey courses against conceptual learning in the curriculum installed in 1942, since they believed that their work had also encouraged such analytic learning among the New Plan students. Rather, the real division of opinion had more to do with the linkage of general education to more advanced and specialized learning offered by the research faculties in the departments as an integral and necessary component of a baccalaureate degree program, and with the parallel assumption that the faculty who taught general education should have the same kinds of scholarly credentials and career aspirations as those who taught more specialized departmental courses. In contrast to the College curriculum created in 1942 and strengthened in 1946, the New Plan was conceived not as a curricular end unto itself, but as a period of intellectual preparation and transition,

227. William Hutchinson noted shrewdly of Gideonse, "Chicago will miss him, although probably Pres. Hutchins isn't sorry to see him go." *William T. Hutchinson Diary*, entry of May 27, 1938. For Gideonse's later career as an educational leader, see Harry D. Gideonse, *Against the Running Tide. Selected Essays on Education and the Free Society*, ed. Alexander S. Preminger (New York, 1967).

leading to the higher and more specialized learning offered in the divisions and the professional schools for the B.A. or B.S. degree. Louis Wirth caught this distinction well when he argued in 1937 that

[o]ur conception of a general education is not one separate and distinct from knowledge of any particulars. We hold that we can only have valid general knowledge insofar as we have valid particular knowledge upon which to base it and vice versa. . . . even in our general education we are not drawing a strict line of separation between knowledge of universals and knowledge of particulars. This intimate interrelationship between general and particular knowledge is all the more evident in our present curriculum beginning upon the termination of the courses given in the College. . . . We are attempting now in all of the Divisions of the University and all of its Departments to build our curriculum upon what has already been achieved by the student in the College.²²⁸

The New Plan accomplished this work of translation not only through the structure of its general education sequences, which embraced the practice of presenting contemporary empirical research in addition to classic texts, but also by offering students in the College the chance to take two specialized sequences as electives in addition to the four general education survey courses. It was thus understandable that when Hermann Schlesinger criticized the new, all-general education curriculum of 1942, he would focus on the gradual smothering of free electives

228. Louis Wirth, "The University," pp. 5–6, unpublished ms., [1937], *Wirth Papers*, Box 51, folder 1.

and the lack of integration within the undergraduate program of general and specialized learning. Schlesinger insisted that the new curriculum

gives the impression of having been designed primarily for students who have developed no individual intellectual interests. In general, those are the students with the least intellectual initiative and the ones least likely to make a real contribution to the life of the nation. I am convinced that the student who has a definite intellectual interest in coming to college will usually be the one who benefits most from his general education. It is this type of student I hope to find in the majority among our future students. But the College will not continue to draw students with intellectual independence if it undertakes a program which throttles individual talent and curiosity, by prescribing the inflexible program which has been submitted to us.”²²⁹

Similarly, Ronald Crane, who was originally skeptical about the merits of the New Plan, concluded in June 1946 that the all-general education curriculum adopted in January 1942 was even less attractive:

If the College could get away from the present lock-step system of courses and course examinations, it might be much more easily possible than it is now to interest distinguished scholars or scientists in the Divisions who are also good teachers in College teaching. Everyone recognizes the importance, even for the purpose of general education, of giving College students an

229. Schlesinger to Clarence Faust, February 10, 1942, *Archive of the College*, Box 21, folder 11.

opportunity of coming under the influence of such teachers, but it is certain that not many of the more stimulating and original minds in the University would be willing to join the staffs of any of the existing general courses and to teach under the controls involved in their constitution.²³⁰

Arthur P. Scott kept a private checklist of faculty in the College who overtly or covertly opposed Robert Hutchins's educational ideas, and the names of most of the faculty leaders of the 1931 survey courses were on it, along with Scott himself.²³¹ It was perhaps noteworthy that the "Memorial to the Board of Trustees on the State of the University" drafted in April 1944 by Ronald Crane and others, which challenged Hutchins's style of governance as President and his putative revolutionary interest in weakening the power and authority of the departments, was signed by Merle Coulter, Alfred E. Emerson, Ralph W. Gerard, Harvey B. Lemon, Hermann I. Schlesinger, Arthur P. Scott, Louis L. Thurstone, and Louis Wirth—full professors who had played decisive roles in organizing the 1931 general education curriculum.²³²

In the end, in the struggles between the forces represented by Harry Gideonse and Robert Hutchins we see the collision of two competing curricular revolutions in general education. The one sought to use the most auspicious work of modern social and natural science, grounded in

230. R. S. Crane, "Memorandum on the College Program," 1946, *Archive of the College*, Box 21, folder 12.

231. *Arthur P. Scott Papers*, Box 1, folder 13.

232. A copy of the memorandum is in the *Knight Papers*, Box 60, folder 14, as well as the "Minutes of the University Senate," April 14, 1944.

a strong historical and developmental perspective, to imagine a world of general knowledge useful for the active, but highly thoughtful practice of modern citizenship. The other sought to recover from the classic works of the past a more coherent but also more introspective vision of learning, stressing the skills of the individual knower and motivated by active forms of educational connoisseurship. Both constituted vast improvements over the curricular chaos of the 1920s, and both would continue to have powerful resonances in the decades to come, on our campus and in the American academy at large. If mass higher education in the twentieth century was to do more than train the technical and professional elites for their careers, then it would need a cultural and intellectual mission to replace the classical learning of the nineteenth-century curriculum. Growing enrollments, the development of modern science, and the professionalization of scholarship had already killed off the classical curriculum. Both Gideonse and Hutchins represented systematic attempts to preserve and to protect the intellectual culture of the modern university against a “collegiate” culture that stressed adolescent amusements more than serious intellectual engagement. The new century needed new alternatives, and the fateful collision of the ideals represented by Gideonse and Hutchins under the aegis of the New Plan made the 1930s a particularly fruitful and memorable time at the University of Chicago.

TRACES AND MEMORIES



Harry Gideonse believed that the first general education courses at the University were “an attempt to substitute a twentieth-century *cosmos* for the almost incredible *chaos* that has arisen in American higher education as the unplanned fruit of our rebellion against the old classical curriculum.”²³³ This new cosmos required strong and consistent leadership, but as the 1930s evolved the teams who organized the first general education courses began to fragment. The first to go was Ferdinand Schevill who left the humanities course in 1935, following the death of his wife to cancer, and returned to full-time writing. Harry Gideonse was forced out as the leader of the social sciences course in the spring of 1938. Louis Wirth and Jerome Kerwin also abandoned the social sciences course, although they followed its subsequent history with some concern.²³⁴ Harvey Lemon resigned from the chairmanship of the physical sciences general course in early 1939. Professional responsibilities had already distracted Hermann Schlesinger, who by 1937 was “so busily engaged in other responsibilities that he does not find time any longer to attend regular staff meetings or conferences.”²³⁵ To make matters worse, Chauncey Boucher decided to abandon the Deanship of the

233. Harry D. Gideonse, “Integration of the Social Sciences and the Quest for Certainty,” *The Social Studies*, 27 (1936): 365.

234. Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, May 25, 1988, pp. 13–18.

235. Lemon to Brumbaugh, November 17, 1937, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 1; Brumbaugh to Lemon and Schlesinger, February 9, 1939, *PP 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 42, folder 6.



Jerome C. Kerwin, Moffett Studio, Chicago, January 16, 1947.

College for the presidency of the University of West Virginia in the spring of 1935. His decision was most likely the result of the embarrassment and frustration that he felt over Hutchins's failure to support the New Plan and his sense that the attacks in the *Maroon* in the winter and spring of 1934 had Hutchins's good wishes behind them.²³⁶ Boucher had been a strong Dean, who had a clear vision of the kind of educational programs that he thought that the College should pursue and who enjoyed credibility among the faculty. In his place Hutchins appointed Aaron Brumbaugh, a genial administrator and a sometime professor in the Department of Education who had no serious research credentials and no real educational ideas of his own, and until Clarence Faust's appointment as Dean in mid-1941, the College drifted, lacking strong leadership. World War II brought more severe disruptions, and the new, all-general education curriculum that passed in January 1942 recentering the B.A. degree was the final denouement of the New Plan.

The later history of these early "Core" courses was complex, marked in some cases by disillusionment and hurt feelings but in other cases by remarkable resiliency and great pedagogical progress. The biological sciences and physical sciences general courses survived into the later 1940s, but the venerable courses were criticized by divisional interests as lacking

236. After three frustrating years at West Virginia, Boucher was appointed chancellor of the University of Nebraska, where he served from 1938 to 1946. On his later tenure, see Rex J. Cogdill, "A Study of the Chancellorship of Chauncey S. Boucher at the University of Nebraska, 1938–1946" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1995). Ironically, Boucher's relationship with the Nebraska faculty was just as rocky as that of Hutchins at Chicago. A recent study concludes that, in spite of Boucher's many positive accomplishments in running that land-grant university, "[h]is biggest leadership failure appears to be his inability to establish and maintain positive communications with the faculty at Nebraska." Cogdill, p. 388.

in sufficient depth to prepare students interested in future advanced study in the sciences. More importantly, they found themselves in serious competition with a set of new Natural Sciences courses developed for the four-year program of the curriculum created in 1942, and they were eventually subsumed into the larger structure of Natural Sciences between 1950 and 1952. The old science courses thus found themselves trapped between new general education ideals of the post-1942 Hutchins College and the rapidly evolving research professionalism of the post-1945 science establishment at Chicago. Joe Schwab, a forceful leader of the new Natural Sciences program, admitted much later in his life that the competitiveness between the old courses and the new Natural Sciences courses was by design, since he felt Merle Coulter's course in particular was

very recalcitrant. They had their big package of brittle books and their big package of lectures duplicated for them, and discussions which were nothing but going over those two texts. They were hard. I set up a separate and competitive natural sciences program simply to needle them into change, which it did to about a 25, 30 per-cent extent.²³⁷

Schwab's assessment of Coulter's course was unduly negative, but it was the case that each group tended to go its own way. The result was that staff members involved in the undergraduate science courses wondered, as they put it in a memo to the Dean of the College in 1948,

what the ultimate fate of science in the College was to be. The result [of the competition] was most unfortunate for the College:

237. Interview of Joseph J. Schwab with Christopher Kimball, April 8, 1987, p. 19.

communication between the staffs broke down almost completely, important educational issues went undiscussed, and personal relations between colleagues were strained.²³⁸

Still, even within the original biology general education course one found seeds of change. When Merle Coulter became concerned that the course, in spite of its rhetoric, was emphasizing too much “passive assimilation” of material and too little conceptual thinking about basic biological processes, he commissioned his staff in 1939 to draft a small booklet of “Thought Questions,” in which the student encountered two hundred questions that he or she might pose about the material that was being presented, which asked the students “to reorganize that knowledge, to apply it to new situations, and often to add reasoning processes of his own in order to arrive at satisfactory answers.”²³⁹ Discussion sessions were then formed around the questions, so that students were forced to think about larger conceptual issues. One of the co-authors of these “Thought Questions” was Joe Schwab, a young instructor in biology. Schwab had received his Ph.B. in English Literature at Chicago in 1930 but then

238. Thornton L. Page, J. J. Schwab, H. Vogel, and E. P. Northrop, “A Proposal for the Improvement of the College Programs in the Natural Sciences,” confidential [September 1948], *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 6. By 1951, the natural sciences staff in the College had abandoned the structure and techniques of the 1931 course in favor of small sections that met five hours a week. See Benson Ginsburg to John O. Hutchens, August 26, 1951, *Archive of the College*, Box 7, folder 7.

239. Merle Coulter, “Report on Ten Years of Experience with the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences,” October 1941, p. 28; *Thought Questions for the Introductory General Course in the Biological Sciences* (first edition, Chicago, 1940).

shifted to Biology for graduate work, receiving his Ph.D. in Zoology in 1938 with a dissertation supervised by Sewell Wright. Schwab began as an instructor and examiner in the biology general course in 1937, and emerged as an active leader of the College's all-general education curriculum after the upheavals of 1942–46. He later became one of the most famous teachers of the Hutchins College, but he was also viewed by many colleagues as a partisan of Robert Hutchins.²⁴⁰

Leadership for the social sciences general courses after 1938 initially proved problematic. Once Harry Gideonse left, Aaron Brumbaugh tried to persuade William T. Hutchinson of the Department of History in June 1938 to take charge of the courses, offering him both a promotion to full professor and an increase in salary, but Hutchinson refused to be “bogged down” in what he called the “the College morass.”²⁴¹ A former graduate student of Charles Merriam, Walter H. C. Laves, was then recruited to take charge. Laves valiantly tried to keep the course together between 1938 and 1941, but he was a poor lecturer and lacked Gideonse's

240. Maynard Krueger later recalled that Schwab “had the reputation of not only being an ardent Hutchins supporter, he was regarded as a supporter of everything that Hutchins was suspected of being in favor of, including maybe some things that Hutchins wasn't in favor of.” Interview with Christopher Kimball, May 25, 1988, p. 22. On Schwab see now Donald N. Levine, *Powers of the Mind. The Reinvention of Liberal Learning in America* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 114–145.

241. “I declined promptly because I wish to move into graduate instruction and have more opportunity for research. Thereby I probably missed a full professorship and corresponding advance in salary. But I got out of the College morass of papers, Board of Examiners, etc., 4 or 5 years ago and I'm not prepared to bog down there again, even though by not accepting I sacrifice both money and position.” *William T. Hutchinson Diary*, entry for June 8, 1938.

wide knowledge of the social sciences.²⁴² He also lacked the support of his own colleagues, several of whom finally took the extraordinary step of appealing to Hutchins to force Laves out. Under pressure from Hutchins, Laves soon left the University on a leave of absence to work for the government during the war, leaving Maynard Krueger as acting chair of the course.²⁴³

Some of the early young assistants also turned away. James Cate and S. William Halperin abandoned the College's general education programs, tempted in the late 1930s by the prestige of departmental teaching and, at least in the case of Cate, disillusioned by Hutchins and with the curricular changes enacted in 1942. Mary Gilson retired from both the social sciences general course and the University in 1942, after which she taught at Wellesley College and at Webber College in Florida. Norman Maclean left the humanities general course in 1937 for full-time teaching in English, but remained active in the affairs of the College, serving as the College's Dean of Students during World War II. But the cases of Maynard Krueger and Gerhard Meyer demonstrated a positive

242. Louis Wirth took Laves's appointment as a signal that "[t]his can mean only one thing, therefore, namely that they are planning not to strengthen but rather to ignore the social science work in the College, hoping probably in that way to put something else in place of it which is more likely to suit the ruling elite." Wirth to Gideonse, July 28, 1938, *Wirth Papers*, Box 4, folder 2.

243. Laves left Chicago in December 1941 to work as a director in the U.S. Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. He was soon involved in a number of government jobs, from the Office of Civilian Defense to a consultancy at the Bureau of the Budget, and as an adviser to the U.S. delegation at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 that created the United Nations. Laves became the Deputy Director General of UNESCO in 1947, and eventually taught at Indiana University from 1954 until his retirement in 1972. He was the first person to hold the Wendell L. Willkie Professorship in Political Science at Indiana.

grafting effect between the earlier and later formats of general education in the social sciences. Krueger came to the College (under the formal sponsorship of the Department of Economics) in 1932 from the University of Pennsylvania, having been personally recruited by Harry Gideonse, who knew Krueger from collaborative work they had done together at the University of Geneva in the late 1920s.²⁴⁴ An ardent socialist, Krueger is best remembered for having run as the vice-presidential candidate on the Socialist Party of America's presidential ticket (with Norman Thomas) in 1940. Krueger soon became a fixture in undergraduate Social Sciences and Economics, and was a brilliant teacher. Awarded tenure in 1947, Krueger became in the later 1940s and 1950s an active leader of several of the later social sciences Core courses, and in 1958 he received a Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. In May 1937, five years after Krueger had been recruited, Harry Gideonse with the strong endorsement of Louis Wirth successfully proposed the appointment of Gerhard E. O. Meyer as an instructor in Economics in the College, initially as a one-year replacement appointment.²⁴⁵ Meyer was recommended by Wassily Leontief of Harvard, who knew Meyer

244. Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, April 20, 1988, pp. 25, 43–48; April 28, 1988, p. 3; H. A. Millis to E. T. Filbey, June 23, 1932, *PP, 1925–1940, Appointments and Budgets*, Box 25, folder 9.

245. See the files in *ibid.*, Box 42, folder 1. Hutchins approved Meyer's appointment for "[j]ust one year," but the deadline soon expired, and Meyer was retained. It is not completely clear how Meyer came to Gideonse's attention. It is possible that Leontief at Harvard brought him to the attention of someone in Chicago's Department of Economics, such as Frank Knight, Jacob Viner, Harry A. Millis, or Gideonse himself. Louis Wirth met with Gerhard Meyer in New York City after Meyer had already visited Chicago and wrote to Gideonse reporting, "I must say [he] impresses me favorably." Wirth to Gideonse, May 17, 1937, *Wirth Papers*, Box 4, folder 2.

from having worked with him at the Institut für Weltwirtschaft in Kiel, Germany, between 1927 and 1929. A German refugee who was trained as an economist at the University of Kiel and who worked for one year (1932–33) at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, Meyer fled to Paris in 1933 and ended up working as a postgraduate student at the University of Manchester in England from 1935 to 1937.²⁴⁶ After a rocky start in learning how to lead discussions, Meyer established a reputation for teaching excellence, and his probationary appointment was renewed until he was finally awarded tenure in 1946.²⁴⁷ Meyer became one of the most beloved faculty teachers of the College in the 1950s and 1960s.

246. The Kiel Institute of World Economics was a remarkable gathering point of famous and soon-to-be-famous economists in the interwar period, including Gerhard Colm, Adolph Lowe, Wassily Leontief, Hans Neisser, Jacob Marschak, and Alfred Kähler. The general orientation of their work was to explore theories of economic growth and the nature of business cycles from a structural perspective. See Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *New School. A History of the New School for Social Research* (New York, 1986), pp. 97–102, 114, 206–215; Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile. Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research* (Amherst, 1993), pp. 53–58, 93–128. Several scholars from Kiel ended up as émigrés working at the New School for Social Research. Gerhard E. O. Meyer had, thus, an excellent scholarly pedigree, even though he ended up publishing very little during his career at Chicago.

247. “We had some doubts about whether we would get Meyer through [for tenure]. He didn’t have a very good reputation as a conductor of discussion in what we called Social Sciences I, that later became Social Science II. We were almost at the point where we would have had to send him back to Germany when the proposal was made that ‘let’s try him in the second year course,’ what later became Social Sciences III, then called Social Sciences II. Let’s try him in there. We shifted him to Social Sciences II and he blossomed out as if he were a new man. Pretty soon he’s given the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.” Interview of Maynard Krueger with Christopher Kimball, May 25, 1988, pp. 48–49.

Ironically, both Krueger and Meyer, who owed their appointments to Harry Gideonse, ended up with what Gideonse most wanted, namely, a tenured appointment on the College faculty.

Moreover, the fate of the social sciences course was more congenial and less disruptive than that experienced by the two science courses. Under the leadership of Milton Singer, David Riesman, and Robert Redfield, the social sciences general course was able to reconstitute itself in the later 1940s as the second in a tier of three yearlong sequences, using a two lecture/two discussion session per week framework which enlarged the possibilities of seminar-style discussion in the now much expanded general education program. In theory, "Social Sciences II" occupied the functional position enjoyed by the original social sciences course. But parts of the original focus of the old course were devolved onto the new "Social Sciences I" course—particularly the parts relating to the American state and American political culture. After 1947, "Social Sciences II" focused primarily on culture, personality, and social structure, as it continues to do down to the present day.²⁴⁸

The humanities survey course of 1931 was completely transformed in the autumn of 1942, becoming the second part of a multi-year general education project in the humanities, and the study of European civilization via the chronological framework of European history was eliminated as the organizing principle of the course.²⁴⁹ As is well known, however,

248. See David E. Orlinsky, "Chicago General Education in Social Sciences, 1931–92: The Case of Soc 2," in John J. MacAloon, ed., *General Education in the Social Sciences. Centennial Reflections on the College of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 115–125, esp. p. 119.

249. Neil J. Wilkof, "History and the Grand Design. The Impact of the History of Western Civilization Course on the Curriculum of the University of Chicago." M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1973, pp. 2, 29–30.

the study of European history in the College was soon revived as the “History of Western Civilization” course by a group of young historically minded scholars in 1947, over the opposition of other partisans of the new Hutchins College established in 1942. An unrecognized but crucial agent in this struggle was Ferdinand Schevill’s discussion leader from the 1930s, Norman Maclean. Maclean emerged as a leader of the College faculty during the stormy debates in the spring of 1946 about the fate of the Ph.B. degree, a degree that was the last vestige of the New Plan in that it permitted students some free electives as part of their baccalaureate program. It was largely owing to Maclean’s stubborn defense of the importance of teaching European history in the College that the compromise document that was fashioned between the College and the graduate divisions in May 1946 stipulated that the College should create curricular space for a revived History course, which was duly launched as “The History of Western Civilization” in 1947–48.²⁵⁰ Maclean believed that “the College should allow for more diversity both in respect for, and in respect to, the complex state of modern knowledge and the variety of interests of students and the Faculty.” Among those possible interests he considered the study of history to be “one of the great subjects of general education, and I would hope it would be represented quantitatively [in the College curriculum] in proportion to its worth and difficulty.”²⁵¹

250. See Maclean’s defense of the need for a History course in the “Minutes of the Committee on Policy and Personnel,” May 13, 1946, p. 1 and May 16, 1946, p. 3. Maclean was also at odds with Joe Schwab, whom he accused on May 4, 1946, of “smearing” the colleagues who opposed Schwab’s notions about a totally required general education curriculum. See the “Minutes of the Committee on Policy and Personnel,” May 4, 1946, p. 1.

251. “The Joint Sub-Committee of the Committee of the Council and the College Committee on Policy and Personnel,” May 10, 1946, p. 4; “The Joint

Did Maclean do this out of loyalty to Schevill, Scott, Cate, and the other historians with whom he had such profitable and pleasing interactions in the 1930s? If such memories did influence Maclean's staunch leadership, there is a direct human link between the two courses—the humanities general course from the 1930s and "The History of Western Civilization" course from the 1950—centered in the person of the distinguished writer and longtime student of General George Armstrong Custer, Norman Maclean. Many years later, David Williams, a professor in English in the College and a close friend of Maclean's who had witnessed his political performance during the 1946 debates, would insist simply but categorically that "we owe the History of Western Civilization course to you."²⁵² Perhaps it was not surprising that Norman Maclean and his friend James Cate emerged in the 1950s, after Hutchins had left Chicago and Lawrence Kimpton led a controversial effort to scale back the curricular claims of the College's general education staffs, as close personal confidants of Kimpton's on the University faculty.²⁵³ When

Sub-Committee of the Committee of the Council and the College Committee on Policy and Personnel," May 23, 1946, p. 6, *Archive of the College*, Box 21, folder 12.

252. Williams to Maclean, April 5, 1966, *Maclean Papers*, Box 18.

253. Kimpton was unusually candid, for example, with James Cate about the (in his view) fear of competition with the departments that continued to animate the stalwarts of the College. He wrote to Cate in 1958, "We are sweating it out slowly on this undergraduate business. Fortunately we allowed an awful lot of time for talk and for changes, and I think the Divisional boys are becoming a little more reassured about the whole situation. The College is getting increasingly worried, and this, it seems to me, is a good thing. Those boys down there really need to be shaken up, and I think we are generating a situation in which precisely that will occur." Kimpton to Cate, May 1, 1958, *Cate Papers*, Box 2.

Kimpton died in October 1977, Norman Maclean gave an eloquent and affectionate eulogy for him.²⁵⁴

The staffing of the new, discussion-based general education courses created or recreated in the early and mid-1940s was assisted by the integration of teachers from the University High School. A number of secondary school teachers—Robert Keohane, Gladys Campbell, John R. Davey, Howard Hill, Russell Thomas, and Zens Smith were among the most prominent—became involved in the new College-level general education courses because those courses were now part of an integrated curricular program beginning with the eleventh grade that comprehended students who in other circumstances would be in their junior and senior year in high school.²⁵⁵ After the revolution of 1942 some of these individuals became prominent activists on the College faculty, and they contributed substantially to the programmatic élan and high-quality teaching of the Hutchins College, often writing defenses of its logic and practices. They also helped to increase the number of College faculty members who did not have divisional appointments—by 1946 less than 20 percent of the faculty of the College had a joint appointment in a graduate division.²⁵⁶ Yet the fact that many of the colleagues appointed to the College faculty after 1942 were professional pedagogues with a very high level of teaching competence but not scholars heavily active in traditional research disciplines highlighted a dilemma that the College

254. *The University of Chicago Record*, 12 (1978): 18–21.

255. See A. J. Brumbaugh to Gladys Campbell, Gertrude Doxey, Howard C. Hill, Robert B. Keohane, and Russell B. Thomas, May 1, 1936, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 4. These individuals were officially transferred to the College staff as of the 1936–37 academic year.

256. “Minutes of the Faculty of the College, February 6, 1946,” p. 15.

would face for many years to come: if the right kind of teachers were crucial to the success of the College's general education courses, who would select these individuals and what professional criteria would be used in selecting them? In the 1930s, the departments had the formal responsibility for vetting and appointing the instructors who created and sustained the first general education courses. In general, they applied conventional criteria of research promise as well as teaching ability, although the case of Harry Gideonse himself demonstrated that even a department with as august a tradition for research productivity as Economics was prepared to hire a scholar who was very smart, who was a brilliant teacher, but who had only a modest level of formal publications in his field. Once the departments were excluded from hiring College faculty, which happened in 1942, different kinds of criteria were used to hire the faculty to teach these courses. Harvey Lemon had argued in 1936 that the future welfare of his particular general education course would depend on his ability to hire younger scholars with sound scholarly credentials, acceptable to the departments as assistant professors, who would have their primary teaching responsibility in these general education courses. If this were not done, "there is grave danger that not only will the experimental aspects of the enterprise and its continued improvement be lost to sight, but even that the ground already won cannot be attained and consolidated."²⁵⁷ While Lemon asked that the University commit substantial new resources in the domain of undergraduate teaching,

257. "The directors of the course should plan ultimately to staff the lectures with men drawn from the discussion section staff of instructors who hold the interest and enthusiasm of this group, advancement to rank to assistant professors should be made as soon as possible in deserving cases; in the meantime advance in salary should be steady." Lemon and Schlesinger, "After Five Years. An Appraisal of the Introductory General Course in the Physical Sciences," p. 5.

exclusive of graduate education, he was not calling for the creation of a separate College faculty. Yet such a separate faculty was precisely what arrived on the doorstep of the University after 1942.

As the four-year Hutchins College gained force in the later 1940s, tensions emerged with between the College and the divisions gradually emerged. As Edward Shils would later recall,

There was a condition of beleaguerment. Many of the people in the College felt antagonistic toward the divisions. Some people because they were excluded; they didn't have appointments in the Divisions. . . . There were a few people who felt that they were fighting against the Divisions. . . . There were a number of people who were at war with the rest of the university, partly because they felt Hutchins was at war and they felt they were protégés of Hutchins.²⁵⁸

Joe Schwab, from a very different perspective, also remembered,

There was profound and deep enmity between the entire Collegiate organization and the Departments, the Divisions. They had, after all, lost their hegemony over undergraduates and with it, the hegemony, went part of their budget, a big part. All the undergraduate courses disappeared. There were no longer any 200-courses in the Departments.²⁵⁹

258. Interview of Edward Shils with Christopher Kimball, June 7, 1988, pp. 11–12, 15, *Oral History Program*.

259. Interview of Joseph J. Schwab with Christopher Kimball, April 7, 1987, pp. 56–57.

The actual number of faculty needed to organize the first general education courses was small in the 1930s, given the heavy reliance on large lectures as a primary mode of organizing the New Plan courses. Perhaps the most decisive change that accompanied the revolution of 1942 was the slow transformation of our general education courses from being primarily lecture courses to primarily discussion-based small seminars. This change was salutary for pedagogical reasons, but it required a substantial expansion of instructional personnel. When the College had its own faculty in the 1940s and 1950s that was recruited primarily on the basis of teaching ability and curricular imagination and not necessarily high profile scholarship, it was possible to staff the many sections of the various Core courses with highly motivated and qualified teachers who also had faculty rank. After 1958, when the University abandoned the separate College faculty and adopted the norm that future faculty appointments would be joint with the graduate divisions, the staffing of these many and varied Core sections proved much more challenging.

Today we seek to blend these ideals in the norm of the scholar-teacher, men and women of distinguished scholarly attainments who teach a range of specialized courses on the upper undergraduate and graduate levels but who also have serious dedication to the idea of collaboratively taught general education courses. In this specific sense, we have returned to the operational ideals of the New Plan of the 1930s, while retaining the small discussion group, general education model favored by the 1950s. Carl R. Moore, the distinguished endocrinologist and chair of the Department of Zoology, put the issue well in 1935 when he argued that

[t]here seems preponderant evidence of a fairly high correlation between these two types of scholarly activity [teaching and

research] at the college level which leads to the conclusion that the University should be and can be staffed at all levels by creative scholars who are also selected and rewarded for being excellent teachers.²⁶⁰

As I look at the faculty of the College today, I see many such colleagues, and they are the best hope that the traditions launched seventy-five years ago will continue to flourish in the century to come. Yet the history of the early general education courses revealed how fragile the enterprise of collectively taught courses is, how dependent they are on small-group leadership and imagination, and, equally noteworthy, how critical the support of the University at large and especially of the central administration is to sustain these programs. Ironically, in its collective portrait of itself to the wider public the University of Chicago has naturalized the tradition of general education, but our community has often failed to take note of how challenging it is to sustain the quality and the integrity of these courses. For our traditions to continue to flourish, each generation of faculty has to feel that Chicago's general education tradition ranks among the University's highest educational priorities. This is particularly important because the College has sought over the past twenty-five years to cooperate closely with the graduate divisions and the departments in articulating the ideal of the scholar-teacher as representing the norm for faculty appointments. This means that we insist upon both distinguished research work and a dedication to high-quality teaching on all levels, including in the Core.

The first general education courses established the principle that it was beneficial to our students if faculty would work together and plan

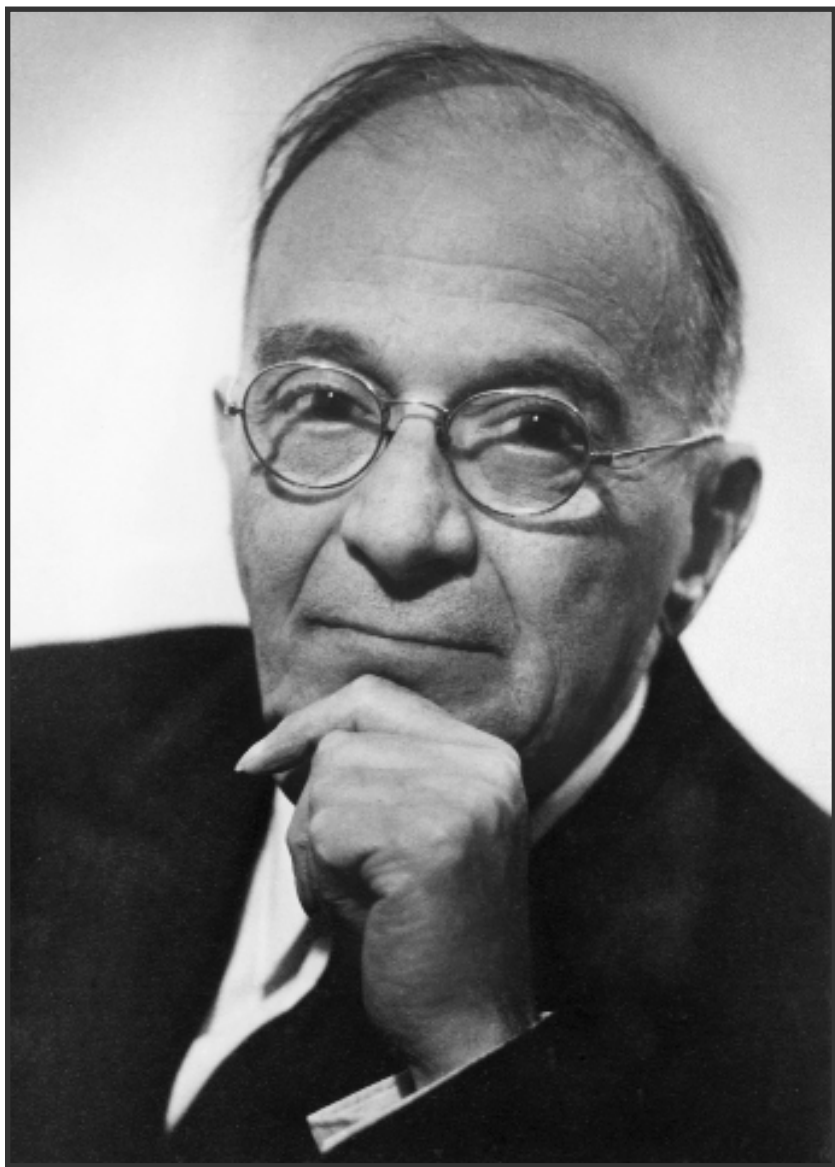
260. Carl R. Moore to Brumbaugh, December 10, 1935, *Archive of the College*, Box 6, folder 10.

multiquarter sequences, rather than simply offering whatever might be convenient for or of personal interest to individual faculty members. The educational needs of our younger students were put forward, and since the 1930s they have never left the spotlight of our College. The New Plan also created strong possibilities for educational innovation, what David Riesman once called “stirring the pot.”²⁶¹ Constant curricular deliberations in the general education staffs and the coming and going of faculty teachers over the decades created expectations that there might always be a better way of thinking about given pedagogical and substantive issues, and new faculty joining the general education staffs were encouraged to embrace this kind of ferment. Chauncey Boucher was particularly proud of the fact that the printed syllabi for the four general education courses were reworked and revised each year, thus giving the teachers of the courses regular opportunities for experimentation and innovation.²⁶²

With the exception of Harry Gideonse, the first Core courses were uniformly products of Chicago faculty intramuralism, developed by faculty with long connections to the institution and who were respected by their departmental colleagues (Merle Coulter, Harvey Lemon, Hermann Schlesinger, and Louis Wirth had received both their undergraduate and doctoral degrees at Chicago, while Arthur Scott received his doctorate on the Midway. Although educated elsewhere, Ferdinand Schevill and Jerome Kerwin had been on the faculty for many years before the new general education courses were launched in 1931).

261. Riesman to Milton Singer, December 20, 1947, *Archive of the College*, Box 8, folder 3.

262. Boucher, *The Chicago College Plan*, pp. 40–41.



Hermann Schlesinger, undated.

The “fit” between the culture of the University faculty and the new educational structures of the College was thus cushioned and empowered by the fact that the leaders of the new courses had solid records of trust and reliability among their colleagues. This may be one reason why the creation of general education at Chicago was able to engender two special attributes among our students that were clearly of immense value to the faculty. The first was a serious intellectual engagement by undergraduate students with a challenging program of study that they took in common. The devotion of our students to intense and thought-provoking forms of learning in their first two years of residence at the University was encouraged by the excitement and the imagination of the first general education courses. In the New Plan our students encountered and profited from the faculty’s own intellectual virtues, and they gained thereby an appreciation of the enthusiasm, but also the seriousness, of intellectual engagement. Over the decades since 1931, the devotion of our undergraduate students to intellectual seriousness has marked the University as a place apart from the normal world of American higher education.

A second crucial characteristic of our culture is academic freedom. The University of Chicago endured several disagreeable crises in the twentieth century to defend the academic freedom of faculty and students alike, and it is no exaggeration that we became a model for other universities, giving them courage to stand up for their rights as well. As one Trustee put in it in 1935, in the wake of the Walgreen fiasco,

I have thought a great deal about the University of Chicago and the difficulties which you are now passing through. I believe that we are making history in our stand for academic freedom and that we will all realize after the storm has blown

over, how wise we were in not yielding to the emotional pressure of the moment.²⁶³

Yet the capacity of the University to sustain true academic freedom has hinged on our ability to teach our youngest students from the very beginning of their academic careers at Chicago the importance of the reasoned understanding of conflicting positions, the need for rigorous interrogation of rival claims, and the value of action that is informed by the thoughtfulness of reflection. Our general education courses have come to serve as sturdy launching points for such exemplary teaching. Without an undergraduate student body that accepts the authentic practices of academic freedom, the University's ability as a community to sustain such often controversial traditions would have been severely impeded.

Both of these concepts—intellectual seriousness and academic freedom—have defined the basic mission of our University, which is to sponsor the creation, the preservation, and the transmission of knowledge, and both concepts were profoundly enhanced in the 1930s by the pedagogical culture that our general education courses helped to create and sustain. In challenging our students to engage large areas of human knowledge and discovery, and to do so at a high level at the beginning of their careers, general education contributed to the intellectual seriousness with which we endow the whole of our curriculum. And in teaching students how to differentiate good from bad ideas, sound from faulty reasoning, and precise from imprecise arguments,

263. Albert L. Scott to Harold H. Swift, May 9, 1935, *Harold Swift Papers*, Box 190, folder 4.

general education has had a powerful seeding effect in training generations of young undergraduates in the skills of the scholar: intellectual engagement, dispassion in the midst of controversy, and courage in the face of intellectual uncertainty.

The general education programs of the 1930s were born in the heat of intellectual controversy based on conflicting modes of scholarly inquiry. The founders of these courses did not intend that their content should be unchanging, for to view them in such an inflexible light would have turned them into mausoleums, not exciting educational projects. The notion that Chicago's general education traditions have always been or should be always constant and unchanging is not only unhistorical, it violates the very premises on which the New Plan was first founded. The architects of the New Plan knew that our general education programs must be dynamic and must evolve or they will fail to engage the imagination of faculty and students of the future.

The New Plan also enabled remarkable efforts to think about the sequencing of various stages of collegiate learning in a major research university and about how liberal learning in the College might be connected with undergraduate education in the professional schools. The existence of undergraduate business, law, and social work programs in the 1930s, based on the foundation of the New Plan general education courses, gave interested College students a number of flexible opportunities to connect general and professional education. That the University of Chicago throughout the life of the New Plan had an undergraduate business major, undergraduate degree programs in the School of Social Service Administration and the Divinity School, and a program that was tantamount to an undergraduate Law major, showed the curricular robustness and the capacity for living with both irony and complexity that marked the University's engagement with undergraduate liberal

education in the 1930s and 1940s. The Professional Option Program for Chicago undergraduate students interested in careers in business that was authorized by the College and the Graduate School of Business in 1953 and that operated effectively until the early 1990s was a direct descendant of these pre-1942 partnerships between liberal and professional education.

Finally, the general education structures of the 1930s encouraged the loyalty of brilliant teachers, and such serious dedication to teaching on the part of the faculty became a long-standing component of the College's faculty culture. In 1942, a middle-aged German refugee from Frankfurt, Germany, who was seeking employment as a secondary schoolteacher wrote to a school principal in Massachusetts with his views as to the value of studying history. Christian Mackauer argued that more than anything else the study of history should not be a mobilization of ideas or facts presented in predigested formats, but rather that teachers were dealing with "the souls and minds of boys and girls. The different courses of the curriculum are as many different sets of gymnastic apparatuses for the development of intellect, judgment, character of the young people entrusted to your care." Mackauer went on to argue that

[i]t will be an immense service to the student when he learns to see clearer and clearer the deepest foundations upon which he rests his judgments, often without knowing it. The discussion of historical problems may help him to discover inconsistencies in his opinions, logical mistakes in his way of reasoning, or gaps in his factual knowledge; but it will never irreverently touch his genuine last convictions. The consciousness that sincere differences of attitude among members of one nation

exist and are to be respected will be one of the most valuable results of this kind of education through History.²⁶⁴

Of course, embedded within the semantic structures of Mackauer's arguments were profoundly value-laden remnants of European culture. For Mackauer was above all interested in defending the freedom of the individual mind, which, in his view, could only be protected by being forced to engage in intellectual activities, much as a professional gymnast exercises to attain a kind of freedom with his body. Mackauer was no less committed to the cultural and ethical values of European civilization than Ferdinand Schevill, but he was writing at a time, and he was a member of a generation who could no longer ignore or dodge the central issue of individual pedagogical agency for the student himself. Schevill believed that studying European culture would reveal to his students the complexities of their civilizational heritage, whereas Mackauer insisted that this heritage had to be treated as an intellectual problem to begin with, to be puzzled over, to be understood in its utter complexity, for the good of the development of that ideal of individual freedom that Schevill had postulated as originating within the European tradition. For Mackauer, studying freedom was not enough. One must practice being intellectually free, and this could happen only through the active involvement of the student in the mechanisms of learning. Ferdinand Schevill may have been a hostage of the First World War, but Christian Mackauer was a hostage of the Second.

264. Mackauer to David R. Porter, the Headmaster of Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts, August 22, 1942. Private correspondence in the possession of Katy Weintraub.

Christian Mackauer's eloquent prescriptions offered a fitting transition to the College of the later 1940s and indeed to our time as well. When he wrote this letter, Mackauer knew little or nothing about the general education traditions of our College. He would eventually have a rich field of opportunity to apply and to realize them when he became a central actor in the creation of the new "History of Western Civilization" course in the College after 1948. But the sentiments that Mackauer expressed would have been most congenial to the men and women who organized and then defended the educational program of the New Plan. Mackauer was a fitting successor to Ferdinand Schevill in his estimation of the immense importance of the European tradition for American intellectual and cultural life. But he was also an institutional heir of Harry Gideonse. Like Gideonse, Mackauer believed that students had to comprehend the complexity and even arbitrariness of received ideas in order to understand their own possible roles in modern society. Moreover, it was deeply fitting that Christian Mackauer was first hired at Chicago in October 1943—not to teach "History of Western Civilization" which did not yet exist, but to teach in the social sciences general education courses—by Maynard Krueger and Gerhard Meyer, who themselves had been hired by Harry Gideonse in the 1930s for the New Plan courses designed by Wirth, Kerwin, and himself.²⁶⁵ This lineage of talent and conviction was strong, and it was, I think, magnificent as well.

265. Mackauer was initially hired late in the appointment cycle of the 1943–44 academic year as a one-year visiting instructor to teach Social Sciences, while on a leave of absence from the Mount Hermon School. See Faust to Filbey, November 3, 1943, *PP, Addenda, Appointments and Budgets, 1938–1956*, Box 2, folder 32. Given that the College was recruiting other teachers from elite private high schools—Eugene P. Northrop in Mathematics was recruited from the Hotchkiss School in 1943, for example—Mackauer's appointment made sense and was

The general education tradition at Chicago that Christian Mackauer embraced in the autumn of 1943 has been of fundamental importance in defining the basic culture of the University. Perhaps more than any

part of the rapid expansion of the College's faculty that took place after 1942. Dean of the College Clarence Faust was initially skeptical about how Mackauer would fit into the new College, but by 1945 he had become a supporter. He described Mackauer in the following way: "Mr. Mackauer has been an instructor in the Social Sciences for two years. The Social Sciences Staff strongly recommended a promotion for him last year. I refused to approve it on the grounds that Mr. Mackauer's age (47), his foreign training and teaching experience, and the uncertainty about his ability to contribute to the development of the courses in the Social Sciences made it wise to postpone a decision about his promotion. During the past year my doubts about him have been removed. His training in the classics, history, and philology have made him valuable in the replanning of the Social Sciences 2 course. He has had a point of view somewhat different from other members of the Staff and has supported it with thorough knowledge and considerable insight. He has been able, despite his age, to adapt himself to the requirements of work with a College staff and with American students. He has been a successful and popular teacher." Budget Narrative for the 1945–1946 College Budget, February 3, 1945, *ibid.* He was finally awarded tenure in 1948. It is not clear how Mackauer's name was brought to the attention of Maynard Krueger and Gerhard Meyer. Mackauer was a close friend of Hans Staudinger of the New School for Social Research, who had connections to many German émigré economists trained at the University of Kiel. Gerhard Meyer was a product of the Kiel School and thus knew many of the same economists as Staudinger. Staudinger may have played a role in bringing Mackauer to the attention of the Chicago general education leaders. Staudinger's earlier career in Prussia as a high-level civil servant during the Weimar Republic is described in Hans Staudinger, *Wirtschaftspolitik im Weimarer Staat. Lebenserinnerungen eines politischen Beamten im Reich und in Preussen 1889 bis 1934* (Bonn, 1982). Alternatively, Gerhard Meyer himself had spent a year at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, where Mackauer also lived in the early 1930s. Indeed, Mackauer's wife was the librarian of the Institut, and it is not impossible that Meyer and Mackauer may have known each other from the pre-1933 period in Frankfurt. I am grateful to my friend and fellow Habsburg historian Leon Botstein for the information about Mackauer and Staudinger.

other leading private American research university, the academic culture of our students and the academic culture of our faculty at the University of Chicago substantially overlap, and this common and shared culture, in turn, licenses a common intellectual citizenship among students and faculty alike. As the revolutionaries of the 1930s clearly understood, the existence of and operational impact of the new general education sequences was a primary motor in encouraging and sustaining an intense academic enthusiasm among our students. Without the project of general education, the University would not only be educationally poorer but it also would be a very different place culturally for faculty as well as for students. This was indeed, as Harry Gideonse rightly insisted, the creation of a new cosmos. We owe the men and women who organized these courses an enormous debt—for their courage, their creativity, and their willingness to imagine a realm of general learning not beholden to strict disciplinary vested interests and designed to stimulate lifelong skills of self-education among our students. It is the obligation of our generation to ensure that the work of general education at Chicago continues to flourish, and that it profits from the energy, the broad-mindedness and tolerance, and the capacity for innovation and risk taking that defined the work of the faculty of this College seventy-five years ago.

As always, I am deeply grateful for your dedication to our students. It is a great honor to serve as your Dean, not in the least because of the many wonderful colleagues who constitute this faculty. I wish you a safe, constructive, and very successful academic year.

P H O T O C R E D I T S

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