

Review Articles

Two College Programs

A College Program in Action: a Review of Working Principles at Columbia College. New York, Columbia University Press, 1946. xi, 175p.

"Report of the Committee on the Course of Study." [New Haven] Yale College [1945] 45p. (Mimeographed.)

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle observes that just as the way to play the harp is to play the harp, so the good life can be achieved only by practice. The Columbia and Yale professors who have prepared the reports under review seem to have taken this or similar advice to heart. Their studies are addressed to practical rather than theoretical problems of collegiate instruction in their respective institutions. Neither committee indulges in *obiter dicta* about collegiate education in general. Such studies should be welcome to all those interested in higher education, for we have had many sets of college objectives for each clearly articulated and feasible program for carrying out these objectives. It is relatively easy to point the way to educational heaven but difficult to reach the destination over the rough roads of clashing departmental interests and the detours caused by the budget. Furthermore, no one seems to have succeeded in showing us how to tell when and whether our passengers have arrived at the destination. In plain language, objectives are easier to determine than the best ways of reaching them with available personnel and budget, and both are easier than the evaluation of our program and product.

The Columbia and Yale committees share two fundamental assumptions with regard to collegiate education for their institutions. The first is that their colleges should stress the intellectual development of their students, and the second is that a liberal arts program is the chief instrument for intellectual development. The Columbia report defines the liberal arts as "all studies that contribute to the art of living, as distinct from the channeled preparation for making a living." The Yale professors' objectives are "programs of study

which will equip (the student) to live magnanimously and intellectually in the modern world."

Despite agreement on these two assumptions, the Columbia and Yale reports differ radically in purpose and scope. The Columbia committee has been charged with the examination of any and all problems which affect the success of the college program; the Yale committee is limited to consideration of the courses of study and their administration. The Columbia report is addressed to professional colleagues in other institutions and to interested laymen as well as to the Columbia faculty, while the Yale study was made for the use of the Yale College faculty alone. The Columbia men stress the continuity of the new plans with the college program of the past twenty-five years; the Yale report advises a more radical break with the former curriculum.

A College Program in Action begins with admissions plans and recommends a faculty standing committee to aid the university admissions office in marginal cases, the requirement of satisfactory evidence based upon a written examination that candidates have mastered the English language to a degree which indicates ability to do college work and that approximately one-third of the student body should be selected from Greater New York, one-third from a 50-mile radius, and one-third from remoter points.

Columbia College has long been a pioneer in experimentation with survey courses at the freshman and sophomore levels which integrate the subject matters of the social sciences, the humanities, and, more recently, the sciences. The committee has no significant changes to suggest in these courses, with the exception of the science survey. In place of the present survey courses in science which have never been required of all undergraduates and which have never fully integrated the presentation of the several sciences, the committee recommends that a well-integrated two years' course in the natural sciences be required for all students who are candidates

for a degree, quite irrespective of whether such students plan to enter one of the scientific professions or not. This course should be staffed by men who are prepared to give competent instruction in all of it and not simply in some fragmentary portion. The primary aim is to provide familiarity with the principles and methods of science.

Except for the revision of the introductory courses in science, the Columbia committee is more concerned with curricular problems of the upper than of the lower college years. The fundamental problem is to get students to recognize the value of consistent mental discipline in their junior and senior years. The college has been working toward an offering which will permit one of three educational choices, under advice: (1) specialization; (2) intensified study within two or three related fields; or (3) even broader acquaintance with the advanced reaches of the liberal arts. For these purposes, the college offers colloquiums, seminars, lecture courses, and reading courses.

Other interesting curricular suggestions are: increased stress upon the literature and verbal facility in foreign language courses to replace mere "reading knowledge," plans for supplementing the work of the English department through cooperation of instructors in subject fields in checking papers which contain inept English, and extension of requirements for physical education to the junior and senior years.

Under administration the committee recommends a committee on policy to be appointed by the dean to act as a cabinet, more compensation for assistants to the dean, a committee on honors, more initiative for college departments in budgetary matters and in forming college departmental policies.

The college library is given a page in the report under equipment and facilities. Despite this unpromising position the committee seems to be more aware of the relation of the library to the total college program than is evidenced in most publications of this type. The college librarian is a member of the teaching staff of contemporary civilization but is not a member of the college faculty. He has provided open-shelf space for books related to upper college courses. This permits the display not only of books regularly assigned but of additional volumes related to

the subject. Rooms for the use of seminar groups are provided with books relating to the topics discussed by groups occupying the rooms.

The report of the Columbia committee seems weak in two respects to this reviewer. First, the problems connected with securing and keeping the services of the best college teachers have not been adequately explored at the level of either junior or senior members of the teaching staff. This is of great importance in a program which involves finding men to staff such courses as the new science survey. Such men should be at home in several sciences. This means that a new type of scientist must be developed who places teaching above research, at least research of the specialized type that has in the past led to recognition. Yet the committee on plans has not attacked the problem of promotion with concrete recommendations. The committee recommends that assistants and instructors who constitute almost one-half of the teaching force of the college be retained no longer than five years if they are not to be promoted eventually. This is a salutary rule in many respects; nothing is more sour than an ambitious person in a dead end. But is promotion to be based upon research or on teaching contributions, or are the two abilities usually, invariably, or equally found in the same person? If the answer to the last part of this question is affirmative, the matter is simple. If it is not true, the college administrators would seem to be faced with the problem of evaluating teaching as against research ability. The standards for evaluating research contributions are fairly tangible; the criteria for measuring a good teacher are nebulous. The committee would have performed a great service to teaching at Columbia and elsewhere if they had pressed recommendations for the evaluation of teaching and for greater attention to teaching ability by those responsible for making college promotions.

Second, in a program such as has been outlined, a strong case might have been made for faculty status for the position of college librarian. This officer should know in detail the purposes, techniques, and problems of every member of the teaching staff of the college as they relate to students and materials. Such a person would have much to

contribute to the over-all direction and evaluation of the college program, if he enjoyed the status and privileges of a member of the permanent faculty of the college.

Yale Plan

The proposals of the Yale committee fall into three main plans: (1) the standard program for the great bulk (perhaps 85 per cent) of the candidates for the bachelor of arts degree; (2) the scholars of the house program, an honors plan dealing with juniors and seniors only; and (3) an experimental program which would apply to the student from his entrance to his graduation.

The standard program falls into four phases. The first is basic studies which includes requirements in English, modern language, and systematic thinking. The requirements in systematic thinking may be met with a course in mathematics, logic, or linguistics.

The second phase is the program of distribution and requires at least one course in: inorganic science, organic science, the classics or classical civilization, sciences of society, literature and the arts, and courses in integration. The purpose of the courses in integration which are to be constructed are to "pull together the student's learning and to show him how synthesis may be made in the modern world today. The courses offered here are philosophical, historical, and synoptic."

The third phase is the requirement for summer reading throughout the student's college career. The sample program for the summer following the freshman year lists twenty titles distributed through the fields of English and American literature, European literature, biography and history, studies of society, and science. Candidates must read and be examined upon eight of these titles, at least one and not more than two being in each group. If he so desires, the student may elect to read in a modern foreign language from lists to be prepared by those departments.

The fourth phase is a program of courses leading to a major. At least one-half the time of the last two years will be devoted to the major subject. Interdepartmental majors are provided.

The scholars of the house program, a title first employed by Bishop George Berkeley,

will allow the exceptionally mature and able student to set up a plan of study which will largely free him after the sophomore year from formal requirements. His work will culminate in an essay which should be mature and distinguished.

The experimental program is planned for thirty or forty men—a cross section of a normal class. All courses in the first two years are prescribed in this program. At the end of the second year the student selects one of five field majors: history of the West, studies in society, literature and the arts, general science, and philosophies and religions. Within each of these fields three categories of course work should be designated: information and concentration; breadth and relation; theory and interpretation.

The skeleton outline of the Yale programs given above is enriched in the report with specifications for many of the courses and with detailed consideration of such possibilities as passing from one to another of the three plans.

Both the Yale and the Columbia plans seem to the present reviewer to be open to criticism on the ground that no consideration has been given to specific techniques for evaluating the new proposals and courses. For example, how will the Yale faculty determine whether their experiment in the experimental program "worked"? No criteria have been set up by either group for evaluating either student development or teacher efficacy. Evaluation of the educational process should go beyond new courses, or whole curricula, to a consideration of how faculties can judge whether their efforts in the years to come under the new organizations are more effective than under the old curricula.

It is easier to call for evaluation than to suggest how it could be accomplished. Obviously, airtight proof of the superiority of the new programs over the old is out of the question since education is not an exact science in the same degree as physics or chemistry. But some approach to an answer to the question whether these programs are effective or not might be possible if careful records were kept of the development of alumni over a ten- or twenty-year period following graduation. For example, one of the objectives of the Columbia Physical Education Department is to form habits of exercise and health

which are the basis for physical fitness throughout the rest of life. Periodic surveys of the health of Columbia College alumni as compared with men who have enjoyed comparable education in other colleges might be useful in improving the college health program. Again, intellectual development of alumni of these colleges might be evaluated through surveys of their reading interests, levels, and critical ability. Unless a substantial proportion of the alumni have grown in these and other respects such as civic responsibility during a ten- or twenty-year period following graduation, the college can claim little credit as an educational institution.

The alumni do not enter the picture in either of these plans under review. They are, however, one key to the problem of evaluation of the worth of the college to society. Granting that this is an enormous, complicated, and expensive job and one which will not yield completely to scientific methods, some attempt certainly should be made by at least a few pioneer colleges and universities, perhaps with the help of funds from research foundations, to test the social worth of their product, not only on commencement day, but on the day of judgment. In this way the results of education can be measured.—Neil C. Van Deusen.

Controversies in Education

Education for Modern Man. By Sidney Hook.

New York, Dial Press, 1946. xiv, 237p.

Education may have few certainties but it has many controversies. Sidney Hook is one protagonist in the current controversy between the progressive school of thought, which has been entrenched in educational theory for some time, and the heritage or common discipline school of thought, which bids fair to dislodge the defenders. A disciple of John Dewey, Mr. Hook is on the progressive side.

The contribution of *Education for Modern Man* can be more readily appraised against some notion of the issue itself. Both contending groups seek by and large the same educational objective of high intellectual competence. One group, the challenger, stresses a central core of recurring problems and permanent values. It believes that critical examination of our heritage and of what great men have said about essential human problems will lead to the desired competence. And it holds further that all persons should be subjected to this common discipline. The second and more established group, which Mr. Hook defends, stresses the immediacy of problems and the pragmatic nature of values. It believes that emphasis upon the current scene will lead to the desired competence. And because men differ in their capacities and potentialities, it favors individualized programs of study.

The issue is clearer in theory than in practice and clearer in the accusations than in

the professions of faith of the protagonists. Most schools fall somewhere between the two extremes. Most educational theories contain some elements from both sides of the argument; Mr. Hook, for example, specifies study of the past among his content of instruction and recommends attention to the natural sciences by all students. The issue is really sharp only when one reads what the opponents on each side claim the other side stands for.

The controversy might be termed "The Battle of the Books." Perhaps when all the epigrams and recriminations are removed, it comes down to a question of whether *Mein Kampf* or *The Prince* is better suited to fostering an understanding of totalitarianism. The current controversy in education is partly a problem in book selection, a problem not unfamiliar to librarians.

Mr. Hook, following the prescription of polemic writing, divides his attention between demolishing his opponents and pressing his own views. He is most incisive in the role of critic. The "stupendous and dangerous ambiguity" of Meiklejohn, the "atrocious logic" of Robert Hutchins, the "recognizable absurdity" of Mark Van Doren are demonstrated. Judging from Mr. Hook's adjectives, his opponents are hardly worth his mettle. Yet he returns again and again to the fray, with all the fury of a fox terrier demolishing a rag doll.

Mr. Hook's criticisms would cast greater illumination if they had more light and less heat. His particular obsession is the program