

St. Olaf Colleagues: As Boldt Chair in the Humanities I led a faculty seminar last semester for new, tenure-track faculty from across the college (political science, chemistry, math, music, biology, and art history). This is a report to you, so that you have some idea of the issues we discussed. I first provide a copy of our syllabus, which lists our readings as well as our eleven visitors, who were very helpful for us and to whom I again give my heartfelt thanks. Then I provide a brief summary of some of the debates we engaged.

Boldt Faculty Seminar, Spring 2002

Participants: Ed Langerak, Chair, Kurt Burch, Paul Jackson, Julie Legler, Kent McWilliams, Jean Porterfield, and Nancy Thompson.

2/7: Introductions: personal history; one's discipline; its role in liberal arts education; main challenges to it and to teaching it; professional interests and projects; hopes and worries; etc.

2/12: Introductions continued:.

2/14: Introductions continued as needed.. Begin discussion of

The nature and history of liberal arts education and challenges facing it. Read part I of *St. Olaf College: Identity and Mission for the 21st Century (IM)*.

2/19: First half of *All the Essential Truths about Higher Education*, George O'Brien.

2/21: Second half of O'Brien.

2/26: First half of *What's College For?* by Zachary Karabell.

2/28: Second half of Karabell.

3/5: Essays: Boyer on scholarship reconsidered; Gitlin on identity politics in academia; Brann on traditional liberal arts; Mac Donald on why teachers can't teach; Levine on changes in liberal arts education

3/7: Visitors: Al Finholt and Eric Nelson

3/12: Church-Related Education. Part II of *IM*.

3/14: Chapters 2,4,26,27, and 31 (at least) from *Called to Serve*, ed. Pam Schwandt.

3/19: *Quality with Soul*, Robert Benne, 1-4.

3/21: Benne, 5-8.

Spring Break

4/2: Selections from *Religion on Campus*, eds. Conrad Cherry et. al. and *Lutheran Higher Education*, Ernest Simmons. Essays from *Intersections* and by Jodoch and Marty.

4/4: Visitors: Carol Holly and Bob Nichols.

4/9: Student Culture. Part III of *IM*.

4/11: Selections from *Making the Most of College*, Richard Light.

4/16: Light and first part of *Generation X Goes to College*, Peter Sacks.

4/18: Sacks continued. Essays: Astin on how liberal arts affects students;

4/23: Visitors: LaRue Pierce, Jim Farrell, and Ted Johnson.

4/25: Challenges for New Faculty. Selections from *Faculty in New Jobs*, ed. Robert Menges, and essays on challenges for new faculty.

4/30: Visitors: Margaret O'Leary and Eric Cole.

5/2: Teaching and students. Selections from *The Chicago Handbook for Teachers* and essays on teaching.

5/7: Visitors: Steve O'Neill, Colleen Skluzacek, Dian VanGuilder, Jim McKeel, Peder Bolstad.

5/9: Two Cultures: *Thinks*, David Lodge, and references to E.O. Wilson's *Consilience* and Wendell Berry's *Life is a Miracle*.

5/14: Teaching and Learning. Conclusion.

Summary of Discussions

The first three and largest sections of the seminar followed the three divisions in our recently published *St Olaf College 2000: Identity and Mission for the 21st Century* (thanks again, Jim Farrell).

Under the **Liberal Arts** rubric, we discussed O'Brien's distinction between the college as an institution and the college as an idea, the former being a lot less tidy, but usually the one we must deal with. We also noted the prediction by several writers that tenure cannot survive as it is today, and, among many other things, we debated the extent to which faculty loyalties have shifted from the college as an institution to the instructor's discipline.

The **Church-Related College** section had us asking why only 5% of Lutheran high-school graduates go to a Lutheran college. We discussed at some length interpretations and implications of the two-kingdoms doctrine. We evaluated Benne's typology of religious colleges—orthodox, critical mass, intentionally pluralistic, and accidentally pluralist—noting that St. Olaf shares some of the characteristics he attributes to the last three types. We asked whether his reference to three circles of faculty attitudes toward the religious mission of the college—torchbearers, sympathetic supporters, and sympathetic toleraters—should be interpreted as concentric circles or as mutually over-lapping ones. We tended to agree with Jodock that what is distinctive of a good college of the church is more the *motivation* for the educational mission, and less its *content*, but we noted the difficulties Wolterstorff warns about in such an approach. We agreed with Simmons that the identity of a college like St. Olaf is more a matter of process (conversation) than possession, but also agreed that the continual discussion of who and what we are can look a bit self-obsessive. And it also matters as to who owns or controls the conversation.

Under **Student Culture** we saw a real contrast between the Harvard students Light writes about optimistically and the junior college (unnamed) students that Sacks writes about pessimistically. With our guests for this section as well as for the **Teaching and Students** section, we discussed whether our students are coming with more of a sense of consumer entitlement than in the good old days (yes, but it's not a major problem here) and also the large and growing personal problems that students are bringing with them (the statistics from the counseling center are quite sobering). We also discussed differences in learning styles, both among students and between the majority of students and the majority of faculty. The retention rate differences between lectures and a variety of more active ways of learning are stark (as much as 85%), so we discussed the implications for our pedagogy as well as tips for encouraging more active learning. Included was some discussion of the growing literature about how to engage multiple intelligences in the classroom.

Under **Challenges Facing New Faculty** we exchanged tips on how (and even whether) to score well in all three evaluation areas and also meet one's other responsibilities and interests while keeping one's sanity. The latter seems to be the first to go. Under **Two Cultures** we discovered that some people find false dichotomies heuristically useful, while others find them mainly irritating.

This report gives you just a sample of what went on in the seminar. If you would like to know more about something that catches your eye, please talk with me or one (or more) of the participants.

Ed Langerak, June, 2002