

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW AMERICAN COLLEGE

Daniel R. DeNicola, Rollins College



he story of the "New American College" is about the development of a new kind of institution embodying a set of ideals which may resonate across all of higher education. It begins, however, with the humble matter of institutional taxonomy. How we classify our schools and colleges may seem an unexciting issue, but our classification systems reveal our assumptions, our expectations, and ultimately our values. Recall that a conceptual revolution, a breakthrough, is often presaged by an accumulation of classification problems, an accretion of anomalies, a proliferation of misfits.

This is, in fact, the situation in higher education today: most of the institutions in the United States do not resemble either of the two traditional models: the liberal arts college and the research university.¹ They are misfits. The majority of institutions fall into the Carnegie category called "comprehensive institution," which includes a large and amorphous array of institutions that have vast differences among themselves in scale, in mission, in ethos, and in structure. The category is a miscellany; it does not describe a true type; there are no historic models of excellence implied in the term "comprehensive," as there are for the terms, "liberal arts college" and "research university." The label "comprehensive" seems to signify only that these institutions are somehow more complex than a liberal arts college, but less complex than a research university.

Yet, if a new model for higher education is to evolve at the end of the twentieth century, it is likely that it would develop from this assortment of "misfit" schools. And that, it seems, is precisely what is happening: a new species is emerging from among the so-called comprehensive institutions. It has been called, with some bravado, the "New American College."

¹ The land grant college may be considered to be a third distinct type. Adding this category would not, however, change the observation or the substance of the subsequent discussion. I have delayed until later in the article an account of the two ideal types, liberal arts college and research university; and in the meantime I count on the common currency of those categories.

*H*istorical
 narrative may
 explain but fail to
 justify the concat-
 enation of academic
 programs now in
 place; some units
 may be regarded as
 inappropriate or
 embarrassing in
 quality.

My purpose in this article is to analyze this "emergence" and to outline some of its broader implications. I have three cautionary points at the outset. First, the term "New American College" has come to have both a restricted and an extended meaning. It refers, in the first instance to this emerging species, to a particular kind of comprehensive school and to the conception of education it embodies. But it has also been applied, by extension, to other colleges and universities which emulate the virtues of this ideal. Second, I do *not* mean to embrace *all* comprehensive institutions in the narrative that follows. It can plausibly be argued that there are several novel institutional types coalescing within the comprehensive category – candidates would include, for example, the metropolitan university and the public liberal arts university.² The profile I describe below fits only a subset of the comprehensives; others may not even aspire to this ideal. Third, this New American College is sometimes best conveyed by contrast with traditional models; but by elevating the features of the one, I do not mean to denigrate the other. The "pure" liberal arts college and the research university remain worthy and compelling ideals.

Suppose for a moment that, instead of institutions of higher education, we were thinking about dogs. The conventional breeds are distinct types – the cocker spaniel, the Afghan hound, the miniature dachshund, the fox terrier, and so on. Mongrels are crossbreeds, not fitting clearly into any recognized type. However, apparent mongrels might in fact be members of a breed as yet unrecognized. Were someone to make this claim, we would want first a description of the animals – what are their similarities? how many are there? do their traits persist? It is another step to formally recognize the new breed: it means establishing a kennel club standard, defining an ideal type, determining what a champion is "supposed to" look like. There is a similar two-part task underlying my narrative. I begin with the *descriptive* task of characterizing the misperceived mongrel institutions. This soon shifts to the *normative* task of defining the ideal type, in which desired qualities and definitive aspirations are embodied.

1. THE PROFILE

Five years or so ago, a group of chief academic officers from small comprehensive schools began meeting to discuss common concerns.³

² Self-identified members of these institutional categories have already proceeded through a set of steps parallel to those I describe below: noting their common profile; identifying a shared set of problems; developing a refined sense of mission; making the case for distinctness. Despite important similarities, the results contain significant differences from the institutional type I report in what follows.

³ The original group included the chief academic officers from the following schools (in alphabetical order): Hamline University (Minnesota), Hood College (Maryland), Ithaca College (New York), North Central College (Illinois), Rollins College (Florida), Susquehanna University (Pennsylvania), Trinity University (Texas), University of the Pacific (California), University of Redlands (California), University of Richmond (Virginia), and Valparaiso University (Indiana). I draw on our collective thinking throughout this article.

We had not previously felt any particularly strong institutional ties. We had, however, become aware that our institutions shared a common profile and a remarkably similar set of problems and commitments. (As the study group's conversation has deepened and widened, and as our explorations have been shared at conferences, we have learned that "there are many of us out there.") How are these institutions alike? Although there is no unique set of features that all these schools and only they share, they do have what the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called "family resemblances." Here is a profile.

Perhaps the most definitive aspect of these schools is their *array of academic programs*. At the core of each institution is a liberal arts program for residential students of (mostly) traditional college age. This may have been the totality of the institution for much of its history, and it still provides its center of gravity and dominant ethos. (For some faculty and alumni, it is still what the school is.) It likely attracts a national or regional student body. A second component is a small set of professional schools and/or graduate programs in fields outside the liberal arts. Typically, these programs serve a mixture of local, regional, and national markets. A third component is a set of programs for non-traditional students, including degrees, continuing education courses, and non-credit activities. These are typically delivered in evenings and on weekends, and, of course, serve a local market.

Other defining features are scale, location, and source of funding. These institutions have enrollments in the range of 1500 to 6000 students. Among all comprehensives, *they are relatively small schools*. Moreover, enrollment in each program and individual class size tend to be smaller than that of larger comprehensive or research universities. Our schools typically have a *suburban location*, and many are near urban centers of unusual vitality. A suburban campus may enjoy a strong local market; it may develop on-site evening programs, for example, which would not be possible for schools in rural settings. All are *independent*, and, despite a range of endowments, the majority *rely on tuition* for a high percentage of the operating budget.⁴

Clearly, these institutions are not traditional liberal arts colleges (though they may have evolved from them). They have graduate and professional programs, and they have a commitment to serve non-traditional students. Nor are they research universities: they lack a full

⁴ This is a stereotypical description, and there are schools that vary from this account. Ithaca College, for example, began as a conservatory of music; the liberal arts program came later. Trinity University has fewer programs in the "second component" than the others, and its endowment provides a prodigious share of the annual budget by comparison. Most of the institutions have a religious heritage, and a few retain denominational support.

battery of graduate schools, graduate teaching assistants, and the impressive scale of such schools. And they do not seem to aspire to become either of these.

Whence came these "misfits"? How did they develop this configuration of programs? Each school has its own story, of course, but there are patterns. For some, hard times and low endowments pressed the original liberal arts college into a search for new revenue; fortunate locations permitted tapping new markets with additional programs. In other cases, the community or the faculty pressed the institution to provide educational services beyond its original array of offerings. Some schools purchased and absorbed an independent professional school nearby. Additional programs may have been spurred by entrepreneurial administrators, spawned by a serendipitous gift, or developed through strategic planning. But whatever the institutional history, the resulting profile fits no clear-cut conception. If not liberal arts schools or research universities, what *are* they? And what do they aspire to be?

2. THE SYNDROME

Answering those questions proved difficult. I should make it clear that, nevertheless, all of us were confident that, fundamentally, our schools were sound and stable and regularly offered academic experiences of very high quality. But it's not easy being misfit – especially in a profession in which prestige, pecking order, and a sense of quality are so crucial. Early on, we began to see that our institutional problems formed a pattern. The intensity of these problems varies from campus to campus, and some arise at most institutions of higher education (not just this group of comprehensives); but taken collectively, they seemed to define our plight. I call this a "syndrome" because these problems are interrelated, rooted in our institutional morphology, and symptomatic of a cause we could not (then) name.

The syndrome includes the following:

- Identity confusion within the institution
- Confused public image
- Structural problems
- Fragmentation of campus culture

Identity Confusion (Internal). This is the classic "misfit" problem. Anxious questions about mission persist. This betrays *the lack of a governing institutional metaphor*, a vision of the way in which the various components fit into a coherent whole. Historical narrative may explain but fail to justify the concatenation of academic programs now in place; some units may be regarded as inappropriate or embarrassing in quality. The institution feels the press of choice (and a false dichotomous choice at that): either prune the professional and non-traditional programs and become a purist's liberal arts college, which is often portrayed as a call

for renewed academic integrity and a return to grace; or become a "real" university by aggressive program development, marketing, and fund-raising.

The identity crisis is reflected in *confusion about nomenclature*: the very noun used in the school's name often represents a hard-won battle and much soul-searching: is this to be a college or a university? In fact, some are called "colleges"; some are "universities." But a few of the former are larger than many of the latter. Some "universities" are very small and worry about the pretentiousness of their name. And there are "colleges" which (awkwardly) find they have a (liberal arts or other) "college" within the (whole) "college."

There is the related *difficulty in identifying one's peers*. The institution may have historical ties to several liberal arts colleges, while the professional school and its faculty may identify with colleagues at much larger universities. Yet neither group is valid for comparison for the *whole* institution. (These other institutions probably possess endowment figures, faculty salary scales, and enrollment numbers which prohibit useful comparisons.) Turning to other members of a consortium or athletic conference may be unhelpful; the association may be anachronistic or purely geographical or based on a single commonality. If one turns instead to a list of competitor institutions for admissions, the frustration may deepen: the various programs may have quite different competitors. The traditional undergraduate program may compete nationally with small, liberal arts colleges; the evening school may compete with the nearest state university or community college; the professional school may compete with similar schools at large universities.⁵

Because these institutions defy conventional categories and are relatively recent phenomena, there are *no agreed-upon historical models of excellence*. There has been no shared understanding of what constitutes excellence in a comprehensive institution of this sort; there are no recognized leaders of this type, no standards for "champions" of the breed. Instead, by default and habit, each component of the school looks for peers and paragons to comparable components elsewhere.

Confused Public Image. Given the internal consternation about institutional identity, it is not surprising that the public image of the institution may be confused. *Inconsistent or misleading statistical profiles and descriptions of the school are published*. For example, the basic question, "what is your enrollment?", may yield widely variant answers at the same school. The school may find itself grouped with very different institutions for different purposes. Part of the problem is that those requesting the data – the government agencies, media, foundations,

⁵ Indeed, the chief academic officers in the original study group were not from institutions that saw themselves as peers in any significant sense, and some encountered skepticism on the home campus about the benefits of collaboration.

A liberating
 education requires
 a place and time
 apart for the
 intensive, reflective
 living and learning
 that transforms
 character – a
 central educational
 aim here.

honorary societies, and accrediting agencies – are working with a conceptual system based on the traditional models for higher education institutions. (It is not unusual for this group of institutions to find itself excluded altogether from a foundation's funding by "falling between" the categories used soliciting applications.) Consider the statistics on retention of undergraduates, for instance, which may be meaningfully compared among traditional, residential liberal arts programs; but if the non-traditional, evening program students' (typically high) attrition is included, the result may be negative and misleading—especially if the researcher assumed the typical residential college. When is it a distortion to include and when to omit?⁶ Administrators at these schools must also accept part of the blame for the confusion of image, because we have often taken advantage of these ambiguities to portray ourselves differently to different publics. For an honorary society, the school is "a highly selective liberal arts college"; for a local economic impact study, "a dynamic multiversity." Of course, the several academic units likely draw from different markets and may even carry curiously different levels of tuition. As a result, the institution tends to program-specific marketing, which inevitably produces multiple images of the school. The unconnected promotional pieces that result seldom present the whole institution to the student. Very few campuses use their "comprehensiveness" as a selling point consistently throughout their recruitment literature.

Structural Problems. The unusual configuration of academic programs carries with it *problems and oddities of administrative structure*. At worst, in an effort to achieve tidy lines of reporting and symmetry, such schools reproduce the complex organizational chart of a research university, but to the scale of a liberal arts college. Specialized programs and schools generate special needs, but finding the right academic administrative structure is tricky. Often these schools end up with "small-time" deans, administrators responsible for a strange mix of units, and orphaned programs. Though all try to fend off the multi-layered bureaucracy of the large university, it is a significant moment in institutional history when the chief academic officer is called "Provost" or "Vice President" instead of "Dean." Indeed, *the president and the chief academic officer at these campuses have a special burden* of nurturing specialized programs while trying to bring about a sense of institutional unity and academic coherence.

Student affairs administration is similarly problematic. Everyone is likely to agree that scale argues for a lean, unified student affairs staff – yet the student cultures and concerns of the various programs are diverse.

⁶ There is a horror story of one comprehensive school that plummeted from one year to the next in a magazine's regional rankings, though the institution had changed very little. The problem was that more comprehensive data on the institution were used the second time, and the result was a changed profile, probably distorted, given the magazine's groupings.

Consider, for instance, the discipline, personal counseling, and placement concerns that are likely to arise for a residential undergraduate program, an evening school for employed adults of all ages, and a graduate school of business that enrolls both residential and commuting students.

The budgeting process is unusually complex at such places, because it brings to the surface all the qualms and dissonances about mission and structure. One approach is to circumscribe budget units, centers of revenue and expense within the general budget. This approach allows program accountability for financial performance, but it raises knotty questions of relationships. Does a profitable program deserve to have its proceeds reinvested? To what extent should it subsidize other programs that are less profitable? When does it become a "cash cow," existing primarily for the income stream it generates? The second approach tries to avoid these invidious comparisons by using a "unified one-pot approach" – but it only masks real differences in program expectations, needs, and performances. Most schools have a volatile mix of both approaches.

All of these peculiarities are mirrored in faculty governance systems. How are the liberal arts and graduate/professional faculties to relate in a workable governance system? Scale argues for a streamlined, unified system; but there are significant differences in agenda and style. A small graduate faculty of education, for instance, may find its curricular and personnel issues neglected or misunderstood within a (largely undergraduate) liberal arts committee structure. Usually, a professional school seeks to be a distinct and integral unit within the larger scene of campus governance, but this immediately raises issues of jurisdiction, appropriate representation, apportionment, and the need for an over-arching "all-faculty" or "university-wide" layer of governance. This is the poignancy and bewilderment of being caught between a collegiate, "one faculty" model and a university structure of competing deans, each heading a distinct faculty.

All the above structural problems reflect what Presocratic philosophers called The Problem of the One and the Many, that is, the tension between unity and coherence, on the one hand, and complexity and specialization on the other.

Fragmentation of campus culture. Faculty culture is often fragmented. After all, faculty in different units may have different pay scales, different workloads, different course schedules, different students, different professional expectations, a different ethos. Faculty assigned to evening classes may seldom see colleagues who teach during the day. This happens at research universities, of course, but it seems that at these small comprehensive colleges, because the faculty is smaller within each unit and over all, the perceived alienation is often greater. Differences in self-ascribed professional identity can bifurcate the faculty: the tiresome and misguided

conflict between teaching and research can be especially acute at a small comprehensive school, because it is pulled simultaneously toward the expectations of both the liberal arts college and research university. *Student culture is fractured as well.* One should expect differences between the culture of eighteen-to twenty-one-year-old residential students and that of commuting adult students who are employed full time (and also parents, or divorced, or retired, or seeking a new career, etc.). And graduate and professional school (say, law and business) students are different still. Moreover, students in some academic units (the evening school, for example) may feel themselves to be "second-class citizens" on the campus in comparison with students of other units – perhaps getting inferior service at the placement office, or being unrepresented in student government, or neglected by the alumni office ("who's reunion was it, really?").

Meaningful communal rituals may not exist or may have an awkwardness about them when they do. Commencement is often an uneasy mix of faculties and graduates of different units who really have experienced somewhat different institutions. Even some very small institutions have handled this by yielding to separate commencements. The problem is lack of community, and it cannot be camouflaged, as it is at large universities, by the practical problems of large scale.

The syndrome I have outlined can be paralyzing, impeding institutional progress and undermining morale. It is commonplace among institutions with the profile I have sketched, and it includes problems that, frankly, cannot be solved simply by baptizing them with an up-beat name like "the New American College." But the key to the coming of age of these schools is found in their shedding the misguided comparison to other historic models, and in identifying and exploiting their own distinctive advantages. The transformation of the ugly duckling may begin with the recognition that it is not a duckling at all.⁷

3. THE IDEAL TYPES AND SOME COMPARISONS

A few years ago, a national news magazine described comprehensive universities as perhaps offering "the best of both worlds." The two "worlds" implied are the liberal arts college and the research university. Though this phrase headed the magazine's annual ranking of schools in this category, and the writer may have merely been groping for a lead, the phrase is striking, surprising even to many of us at comprehensive schools. It suggests two points that I now want to make here: (1) *the comprehensive schools I have described possess some of the characteristics of a traditional liberal arts college and some of those of a research*

⁷ This metaphor is from Frank Wong's paper "The Ugly Duckling of Higher Education," delivered at the University of the Pacific in 1990, which provided the original stimulus to our conversations.

university; and (2) however, the blending of those features is special and gives rise to new and perhaps unique qualities. In other words, the blending of characteristics has produced a new type with a distinctive (and positive) character.

To develop these points, I need to say more about the traditional models, as I promised earlier. An ideal type, in the Weberian usage, is of course a fabrication, a thought experiment; it is an abstraction, a perfection projected for heuristic purposes and for guiding action. No actual example may match the ideal in every respect. Among institutions of higher education, ideal types are not simply convenient fictions useful in classification, they are ideals which are emulated. They are models of institutions whose form and function embody conceptions of education.

Ideal types are best grasped by comparison, so let us turn first to a brief sketch of the two that have for years defined our thinking.

The traditional liberal arts college is an institution dedicated to the teaching of undergraduates. It is small in scale, a residential community set apart in a pastoral setting, enjoying a beautifully landscaped campus. In some ways, it is a sanctuary from the world devoted to learning for its own sake. A liberating education requires a place and time apart for the intensive, reflective living and learning that transforms character – a central educational aim here. This conception of education is essentially personal: young, able, and impressionable students interact in intimate classes with inspired teachers who are concerned with the student as a person. Faculty are rewarded for their teaching excellence and expected to be visible role models. The curriculum was originally uniform, then came to be defined by a general education program upon which variations (majors and minors) were added. Students have, therefore, a shared educational experience in a broad set of traditional disciplines intended to develop a set of all-purpose skills, such as critical thinking, effective communication, and proficiency in quantitative methods. Descended from elitist conceptions, the liberal arts model may still seem aristocratic in the luxury of its long-term view, deferring job-specific training and disdaining immediate assessment of educational success. Such a college has a coherence as an intellectual community, a strong sense of identity and mission, and values expressed in traditional rituals which reflect and reinforce that tradition.

The research university is a product of the Enlightenment, of the sense that human reason can wrest secrets from Nature, and that the knowledge that it yields, especially as exemplified by science, can transform the world. Research produces social progress. This ideal is centered on graduate study; the research university is defined by the Ph.D. degree, originally introduced in German scientific education as an advanced degree certifying trained researchers. These institutions are large in scale, requiring enormous resources. The administrative structure and the

The ideal is an institution which is responsive to developments that affect the curriculum and new student and community needs.

curriculum exhibit specialization and compartmentalization, with separate schools and departments having considerable autonomy. The student body is heterogeneous, certainly diverse in age and experience, and usually in other factors as well. Students at the same university pursue vastly different courses of study, each deepening their knowledge of their chosen specialty. This conception of education implies that a restricted focus, a specialization, is required to achieve mastery in research and professional practice. Education is less a matter of the personal, for the (primary) aim is to produce, not a transformed character, but an expert, a competent researcher whose contributions to knowledge will ultimately serve social betterment.

Neither of these quick sketches does justice to a rich and complex ideal, but each should serve to bring to mind salient features for comparison. The comprehensive schools I have described are in some ways like liberal arts colleges: they are relatively small in scale; they retain a "pedagogy of the personal"; they are student-centered places; they have a genuine commitment to teaching effectiveness; they tend to have a liberal arts ethos, a sense of rootedness in liberal arts and sciences disciplines and traditions; and they retain a concern for coherence and community;⁶ etc. In other ways, they are like the research university: offering graduate and professional programs; requiring a more complex administrative structure; enrolling a more heterogeneous student body that pursues quite separate curricular paths; preparing competent practitioners in specialized areas; being monitored by a set of external accrediting agencies for various professions.

What unique characteristics might this blend foster? What specially advantageous features might the small comprehensive school possess? I believe these schools, even when still beset by "the syndrome," have promising features that are often unrecognized and largely unexplored. Here are five significant examples:

- *The extension of "the pedagogy of the personal" into graduate and professional study.* The conception of education as occurring in interpersonal interaction, the concern for values and character, the concern for teaching effectiveness is here extended to graduate and professional programs. The scale – small program enrollment and class size – and liberal arts ethos permit this. The result is that liberal and professional, undergraduate and graduate, education are happening together in an intimate, student-centered milieu.
- *Student diversity.* The variety of academic programs and markets these schools tap generate a student body that is interestingly

⁶ It is precisely because the concern for coherence and community remains at these schools that the fragmentation described above is felt so keenly.

heterogeneous – particularly with regard to age, experience, and social and economic background.

- *Natural connections with the community.* These suburban schools are likely to have the strong interactive relationships with the community: (1) The school recruits local commuting students who become alumni with a continuing interest in the institution. (2) Local businesses often have tuition benefits which sponsor employees' enrollment. (3) These same businesses and local agencies may provide opportunities for student internships, clinical experience, volunteer service, and post-graduate employment.
- *Special educational opportunities.* Faculty can enjoy a wider variety of pedagogical contexts. For example, a faculty member teaching the British novel now has the opportunity to work with experienced adults, who may bring perspectives and a seriousness of purpose not likely to be found in the stereotypical undergraduate. Or, a Women's Studies class can now include the usual undergraduates along with older women of various ages from the community, and thereby provide for a richer interchange for all.
- *Institutional responsiveness.* Their small size and independent status permits these institutions to respond to their own plans and the needs of the community in a timely fashion. The entrepreneurial spirit and administrative nimbleness possible here can be a great advantage. There need be no three-year long, multi-layered process for approval of a new program.

These characteristics do not *per se* define a new type; but they permit it, they even stimulate it, perhaps they may suggest its outlines. It is here that we must switch from description to the normative task, the imaginative projection of an ideal. What might the New American College be?

4. THE NEW AMERICAN COLLEGE: MARKERS OF EXCELLENCE

I begin by setting out several "markers of excellence" for the New American College. These are virtues which exploit the distinctive features, which may define a new type, and which are proposed as criteria of evaluation (helping us tell a good one from a not so good one).⁹

First, *each of the academic components must be excellent in its own right and a valued part of the institution.* This means that the liberal arts ethos must be strong; that professional schools and programs meet appropriate accreditation standards; that there are no programs of

⁹ The following list and discussion is the product of several discussions by our study group. The order and form and emphasis has varied by speaker and context of presentation. While I benefit from the ideas of many, I assume all responsibility for the treatment of these ideas given here.

embarrassing standards operating as "cash cows." Though standards and requirements may vary, they should vary *appropriately*. Quality should be valued throughout.

Second, *the academic units should display synergistic relationships*. "Synergy" implies that the effect of the whole is greater than the separate effects of the components. Here, it means that each academic program is selected and developed in such a way that it enhances the others; among all programs, there are relations of mutual support. This principle of

synergy can be understood aesthetically: think of the difference between a bunch of flowers and a bouquet in which each flower and its placement enhances the others, and to remove one would be to diminish the others. The cluster of programs should be, in short, like a bouquet. Suppose, for example, that the institution has both a liberal arts undergraduate school and a graduate school of business. In the New American College, these should not simply be units of good quality individually; they should enhance each other. There should be a value-added difference for the M.B.A. students and faculty that their professional study is pursued at a place with a strong liberal arts program – and vice versa. Perhaps the international business emphasis of the graduate school is enhanced by faculty and courses in foreign languages and cultures; or, perhaps an undergraduate seminar on leadership enjoys a discussion with the executive-in-residence at the business school. These are modest examples. The more such relationships

become definitive, the less they are marginal occurrences, the stronger the synergy. The powerful virtue resulting from such relationships is *integration*.

The New American College is marked by integration in several forms: theory with practice, to produce applied learning; liberal with professional studies; disciplines with each other in cross-disciplinary study, in which multiple discourses are applied to a problem or a text. This goes well beyond ornamenting the compartmentalized curriculum with a few cross-listed courses or experimental linkages. It implies a conception of education that is different from either of the traditional models; and it has significant consequences for pedagogy. It values diverse perspectives and active learning. A myriad devices may reveal this integration. Professional education may retain closer ties to the arts and sciences disciplines which support it – classes in marketing, for example, may make more clearly visible the application of psychology, economics, rhetoric, etc. Teaching

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel R. Nicola is Professor of Philosophy at

Rollins College (Winter Park, Florida), where

he served from 1983-1991 as Provost and Vice

President for Academic Affairs. He was a

Visiting Scholar at the Philosophy of Education

Research Center at Harvard University during

the 1991-92 academic year.

techniques that integrate theory and practice are frequently employed – problem-centered study, the case method of analysis, collaborative learning projects that involve students teaching each other, integrative seminars, internships, etc. Promoting such applications may become part of the institutional mission, taking tangible form in institutes e.g., the “Center for Practical Politics” or the “Institute for Business Ethics.” These features of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional mission presuppose *faculty* integration, that is, they require *faculty* to communicate across departmental and divisional boundaries.

The fourth marker of excellence is *service to the community*. The focus is placed on applied learning because knowledge creates responsibility. But service is seen here as more than a moral duty, an admirable act of charity; it is seen as a form of learning. In the New American College, students, faculty, and the institution as a whole, are engaged in service. The institution serves the community through its programs and services. Students may volunteer or be required to engage in community service in some form. Faculty may regard service (to their discipline, to the community, to students) to be a truly important criterion of peer evaluation. The ideal of the educated person implied here is not merely one who has knowledge and competence; not merely one who knows how to learn; not merely one who has become a sophisticated consumer of edifying experiences (who goes to concerts and plays and reads the right books). It is one who uses knowledge in service; one who acts with practical wisdom and compassion.

Fifth, *the professional expectations for faculty are different in the New American College*. A convenient shorthand for this altered role is the term “*reflective practitioner*.”¹⁰ The focus on application; the need to integrate liberal and professional studies; the demand for multiple discourses in a cross-disciplinary approach; the heterogeneous clientele; the need to transgress boundaries to collaborate with colleagues and students; the expectation of service – these together constitute a significant revision in the role of faculty. Ernest Boyer has wisely suggested that expectations need to be redefined as well.¹¹ Honored scholarship is no longer confined to the “scholarship of discovery.” While such traditional research is still important, it is not the only “legitimate” kind. There are also the “scholarship of integration,” the “scholarship of application,” and the “scholarship of teaching.” All these forms of faculty professional activity are desirable at any institution, but they are natural and even necessary in the blended New American College I have been describing.

¹⁰ The term comes from *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, by Donald A. Schön; Basic Books (New York: 1983).

¹¹ See the presentation of these ideas in Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*, published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Princeton: 1990), and their development in his article in this volume.

Finally, *the best of these institutions is characterized by purposefulness.* Consider the following polar opposites. There are institutions that have a fixed and firm sense of mission and an unchanging program. If they are wealthy enough, they survive untouched by the world's changes, a campus on a hill; otherwise, they eventually perish. There are other schools (these are far greater in number) which, lacking financial stability and a firm sense of purpose, go chasing after markets, sometimes shamelessly far afield. In their eagerness, they jeopardize both academic quality and a sense of institutional identity and integrity. The ideal is an institution which is responsive to developments that affect the curriculum and new student and community needs. It is nimble rather than ponderous in its responses: it shows good management in its alertness to new opportunities and problems; in the relatively short time between internal decision and implementation; in avoiding bloated administrative structures; in creating "one-stop-shopping" for students; in deploying its existing faculty resources effectively; in playing to its strengths; in using its own assessment to direct its development. Though it is a protean organization with an entrepreneurial spirit, it is governed by its own internal gyroscope, its own sense of purpose. In practice this means that it does not respond to every market, to every expressed need, to every potential donor's wish for a new program. (Remember: *that* particular flower, however lovely, may not belong in *this* bouquet.)

I am now in a position to offer, by way of summary, a thumbnail sketch of this ideal type parallel to those of the liberal arts college and the research university described earlier. The New American College is an institution dedicated to the integration and application of knowledge. It is comprised of a cluster of academic programs that are mutually enhancing. It emphasizes the fertile integration of theory and practice, liberal and professional education, undergraduate and graduate study. Knowledge is understood inherently to involve application; therefore, service to the community has both an ethical and an educational value. The New American College cultivates its multiple ties to its surrounding suburban community, which reflect the integration of schooling and life. In its faculty and its graduates, it seeks "reflective practioners." Several forms of scholarship are valued, and research and teaching are not seen as opposing demands and roles. The institution is protean in its ability to respond quickly and reshape its programs while retaining a sense of purposefulness.

This ideal type combines an institutional form with a conception of education. And just as with the other ideals, the New American College ideal embodies features which may transcend it as a type. Certainly, large graduate institutions and small undergraduate colleges could seek to achieve these characteristics. But the institutional form of the small, comprehensive college fits naturally with this conception of education. As

I want to explain in my final section, it is aptly called both "new" and "American." It is the institution of the post-modern era.

5. CONTEXT, IMPLICATIONS, AND QUESTIONS

It should be noted that there is a sense in which the New American College is a distinctively *American* institution. You will remember that it was John Dewey, the American pragmatist, whose philosophical project aimed to break down dualisms, to heal the bifurcations between head and hand, between theory and practice, between liberal and professional, between school and society, and between who we are and what we do. Experience is essentially educative, according to Dewey, and education requires experience. The resulting "instrumentalism" included a revisioning of schools as places of "heightened living" in which application, integration, and collaboration generated personal growth and social progress. As a philosophical orientation, pragmatism is often interpreted as distinctively American, as containing ideas and approaches which resonate profoundly with "the American character." And Dewey is, plausibly, the premier pragmatist. Dewey's writings have had a greater impact at the elementary and secondary levels than in higher education, though their genuine legacy, even there, is much debated. It has seemed easier to understand and apply his ideas to the classroom teaching than to the vision of an entire educational institution.

There are, let us recall, a number of colleges which flourished in the 1930's as so-called "progressive" schools,¹² influenced by Dewey's ideas. I have in mind such colleges as Antioch, Rollins, Sarah Lawrence, Bennington, and the New School. In their idiosyncratic ways, they modified traditional liberal arts instruction: by granting credit for artistic performance; by incorporating cooperative work and intern experiences; by altering preferred teaching methods, rejecting lecturing (thought to be passive) in favor of a variety of active learning modes; by emphasizing applied learning and interdisciplinary perspectives; by replacing grades with narrative evaluations; by linking social service and political activism. A second wave of "progressivism" spawned another set of "experimental" schools in the 1960's - places like Evergreen State University, Hampshire College, and New College (now a College of the University of South Florida). These schools pioneered other ideas: individualized academic programs; collaborative learning; alternatives to departments; etc.

I am not claiming that the New American College is consciously modeled on the ideas of John Dewey, nor that these progressive

¹² Everyone knows, I guess, that Dewey came to reject the term "progressive school" because many schools using that label belied what he advocated. Similarly, he came to prefer "instrumentalism" or "experimentalism" to "pragmatism."

institutions fit the type. My point is about context and intellectual heritage. I am suggesting that the New American College *has* developed within an American philosophical and educational tradition.¹³

John Dewey's ideas have been championed of late by the influential postmodernist philosopher, Richard Rorty.¹⁴ Rorty has even identified himself as a Deweyan in thinking about education. This suggests interesting questions, which I can only mention here. In many respects, higher education has been profoundly modernist. Postmodernism, nourished within academia, challenges many of the most basic assumptions of our educational institutions.¹⁵ How would postmodernism alter higher education? Does the New American College ideal embrace postmodern approaches (say, for example, in its preference for multiple discourses)? Is it, in short, timely as well as informed by a tradition?

Some would find these interpretations too exalted, too intellectualized and celebratory. Maybe it is right to say that for small comprehensives to remake themselves as the New American College is simply a case of "making a virtue of necessity." I prefer to describe it differently. I often think of the film *Chariots of Fire*, of that marvelous scene of the first evening at high table at Caius College, Cambridge University, and of the master who stands to exhort the new students to "Find within yourself where true greatness lies." That's really what this New American College typing is about: it is an attempt to find where, within the small comprehensive institution, true greatness lies.

¹³ The discussions of our study group have not yet given sufficient attention to this historical and philosophical context. The topic is worth a sustained exploration.

¹⁴ See, for example, works such as *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). For an example of Rorty's Deweyan identification in regard to education, see "Education, Socialization, and Individuation," in *Liberal Education*, vol. 75, no. 4 (October 1989).

¹⁵ For a penetrating and provocative analysis of these and related issues, see Harland G. Boland's article, "Postmodernism and Higher Education," forthcoming in *The Journal of Higher Education*.

