

## TAKING SUBJECTIVITY SERIOUSLY IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT: EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

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*ABSTRACT: In a context of spiraling costs, private liberal arts colleges are facing unprecedented levels of public skepticism in response to claims of educational distinctiveness and value. While from one vantagepoint, this signifies a marketing crisis for liberal arts institutions; it can also be viewed as an assessment problem. To the extent that high-cost liberal arts colleges anchor claims of educational value on their ability to foster as learning outcomes a host of inherently subjective "qualities of the mind" in their graduates, a daunting burden of proof is assumed by those seeking to measure and document such effects. This research employs Q methodology in a preliminary effort to demonstrate how such subtle, subjective effects might be approached and eventually assessed. Results reveal four relatively distinct viewpoints toward educational experience and value at one liberal arts college. Reflecting different understandings of education's most important ends and means, these "learning discourses" deserve consideration as crucial educational outcomes in their own right. At the same time, these understandings may serve to influence student achievement across a range of additional outcomes as well. At the very least, subjectivity along these lines warrants closer attention than it has heretofore received in the assessment literature.*

### **Contextual Prologue to the Problem: The Contemporary Plight of the Residential Liberal Arts College**

The human impulse to wax nostalgic about the "good old days" when times are tough is perhaps nowhere more fiercely indulged nowadays than on the campuses of our nation's liberal arts colleges. For those faculty and administrators who labor at such institutions, it is only natural to hearken back to halcyon days of three to four decades ago. Then the leading edge of the baby boom was coming of college age and the students were not only numerous but well prepared and motivated, when faculty felt confident to "lay on more readings and harder assignments" (Gamson 1984, 12). The

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congenial climate for private higher education in mid-century America was not solely a consequence of post-war demographics. In the wake of Sputnik, higher education, public and private, was considered a national-security necessity. Accordingly, generous federal subsidies, underwritten by the affluence generated by sustained economic growth, encountered no significant political opposition. As critical as such factors were, the robust vitality of *private liberal arts colleges* derived neither exclusively, nor perhaps even primarily, from such conditions.

For true nostalgia buffs seeking subjective refuge in some distant golden age for our nation's colleges of the liberal arts, the historical horizons can be extended even further, back to the turn of the century when nearly seven out of every ten undergraduates were enrolled in private liberal arts colleges (Breneman 1994). The market of such students has, of course, grown immensely in the intervening century. In 1897 less than ten percent of the college-age population enrolled in any post-secondary educational institutions; by 1997 that figure had risen to 50 percent. While the college-student market is vastly larger now, the share of that market controlled by liberal arts colleges is substantially reduced. In sharp contrast to the situation a century ago, fewer than one in five undergraduates attends such an institution today (Lawlor 1997). It seems the days are gone forever when America's liberal arts colleges enjoyed a lofty perch atop the prestige hierarchy of post-secondary schooling. Peering into the future, the prospects for such institutions are hardly promising. "In the starkest and most troubling terms," as members of a Pew Roundtable of some two dozen liberal arts college presidents and deans recently put it, "the question becomes: Why are liberal arts colleges declining in number?" (Wegner 1995).

Cost considerations serve as an integral element in any answer to this question. As recently as 1975, median household income in this country exceeded the cost of four years at a private institution by almost 30 percent. Twenty years later, the cost of attending a private institution was twice the median income of American households. In the decade ending in 1992, tuition costs at private liberal arts colleges rose 140 percent, while the Consumer Price Index increased slightly more than 40 percent in the same period. Granted, costs for students attending public universities were rising at comparable rates over the same period; even so, total annual costs for students attending these institutions amounted to less than 40 percent of the one-year charge for an undergraduate enrolled at a private four-year college in 1996-97 (Lawlor 1997). To many American families with college-bound children, the private liberal arts college is simply not an option for reasons of cost alone.

Costs, however, constitute only one element in the marketing equation. The other side is comprised of benefits, i.e., considerations of educational value. On this score, surveys tell us an increasingly large segment of the potential market for the private liberal arts college is simply unconvinced by claims that the product it is selling is of sufficient educational value to

warrant the high cost of attending such an institution.<sup>1</sup> But what exactly is it that such institutions are selling? What kinds of educational value and/or benefits do (and ought) private liberal arts colleges claim on their own behalf? How are such claims amenable to documentation to serve as feedback for enhancing institutional performance in meeting professed objectives while addressing the doubts of an increasingly skeptical public? These are certainly not new questions. In one guise or another they have been posed and debated throughout the history of higher education in this country. Never before have such considerations been greeted with the sense of urgency that defines the present era (Neely 1999; McPerson and Schapiro 1999).

One clear sign of the seriousness with which questions of educational value are now taken is the volume of attention devoted of late to outcomes assessment (Angelo and Cross 1993; Banta, Lund, Black, and Oblander, 1996). Educational institutions at all levels and of all stripes are now expected — indeed, required by accrediting agencies, funding sources and the like — to document their ability to deliver on their declared educational goals. Inasmuch as the bulk of these goals are subsumed by student learning, the rise of outcomes assessment and the principles of accountability on which it rests have contributed to a healthy and long overdue debate on the defining attributes of the college-educated person.

To those committed to the ideals of liberal learning, as these are pursued in high-cost liberal arts colleges, this debate has produced a two-fold challenge. They must first specify at a conceptual level the nature of the learning outcomes that should be expected of graduates from such institutions; and then devise appropriate means for assessment. Too often those outcomes designated as distinctive and central to the mission of liberal arts institutions seem to defy reliable assessment, while those outcomes which readily yield to quantitative assessment are not necessarily the most crucial within the constellation of qualities considered as distinguishing characteristics of liberal arts graduates (Gardiner 1997; Bourque 1999; Canada 1999; Hersh 1999). The term *assessment* is used generically to refer to a wide range of activities intended to document the effects of educational experiences. These can be quantitative, based on tests; they can also include portfolios containing artifacts (papers, assignments, etc.) representing a given student's work over several years. The broader movement to document learning outcomes might well profit from a consideration of subjectivity, viewed here as "schematic" understandings of their own educational experience that students either bring with them to college or acquire along the way. Such schemata (or "learning discourses") greatly affect the more "objective" learning outcomes that quantitative assessment, as conventionally undertaken with tests, has emphasized.

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<sup>1</sup> For survey evidence bearing on public perceptions and esteem for the educational value (or lack thereof) ascribed by experts to liberal arts colleges, see Hersh (1997).

## The Challenge to Outcomes Assessment Research

Research aimed at deciphering the impact of college on students is hardly a novel phenomenon. Indeed, college outcomes assessment has been ongoing for several decades. In consequence, we can point to a prodigious volume of data documenting many ways in which college graduates differ from their non-college-attending cohorts. In the most recent and ambitious venture of its kind, Pascarella and Terenzini's nearly 900-page volume, *How College Affects Students*, offers a careful and exhaustive review of the results of some 2,600 separate studies conducted over the previous quarter century. Despite methodological cautions about the role of self-selection in gauging the *net effects* of college or university experience, effects do exist, and they encompass a range of variables from the more narrowly cognitive-academic on the one hand to the more affective-interpersonal on the other. Apparently they persist well into the adult years. When evidence on behalf of such generic effects is disaggregated, however, to disentangle the impacts of attending liberal arts colleges as opposed to other institutions of higher education, the results are disappointing for proponents of the educational distinctiveness of the former. As the authors conclude, "...institutional categorizations such as the Carnegie classification appear to tell us little about differences in between-college impacts. Perhaps even more than indexes of college quality, classifications such as research university, comprehensive private university, and liberal arts college may, as suggested, conceal so much between-college variability within each classification that consistent impacts on students cannot be found" (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, 597).

It is the quandary posed by this surfeit of evidence that the study to follow was designed to address. Many of the claims of educational value deemed as central and distinctive to the mission of liberal arts institutions are, in effect, assertions or articles of faith that share a concern with the subjective impact and consequences in the minds of the learners themselves of their college experience. The case is developed by initially sampling from what proponents of liberal learning have said (and continue to say) in advancing their claims of the particular merits of the residential liberal arts college. Proceeding from the Q-methodological premise, student understandings of their own (liberal-arts) education should be explored in their own terms as matters of self-referent subjective communicability (Brown 1980; McKeown and Thomas 1988; Stephenson 1953). This work reports results of a modest attempt to gauge whether such an approach holds promise as an assessment alternative in a field traditionally subsumed by R-methodological standards and practices. The proposition is advanced that one of the "missing variables" which may perhaps account for the failure of other outcomes research to demonstrate much in the way of a distinctive impact for the liberal arts college is the student's own understanding of his/her education. This paper concludes by drawing attention to the implications of such an approach in terms of outcomes assessment when educational quality

is considered more broadly at such an approach in terms of outcomes assessment when educational quality is considered more broadly at institutions with self-proclaimed allegiance to the liberal arts. It is suggested that Q methodology may be essential in understanding the liberal arts college experience from undergraduates' perspectives.

### **Subjectivity in Higher Education's Learning Outcomes: Liberal Learning and the Cultivation of "Qualities of Mind"**

Claims of educational value are predicated on the notion that college *matters*, i.e., that it produces outcomes in its graduates that are acknowledged, appreciable and appreciated. For most undergraduate institutions, whether liberal-arts colleges or not, these outcomes are subsumed by three categories: knowledge, skills and attitudes (Arnstine 1995; Astin 1993; Boyer, and Levine 1981; Gamson 1984). Forty years ago it was widely, if not universally, understood that the "common knowledge" component of a liberal arts education was equivalent to conversance with the canon of Western Civilization's classic works in philosophy and literature. While this understanding is still alive at a handful of liberal arts institutions, it no longer monopolizes the educational ideal of "breadth" of knowledge traditionally revered as a culminating achievement of liberal studies. Partly in consequence of the inability to agree on what *all* liberal arts graduates should know, many if not most colleges have resorted to less prescriptive programmatic expressions of academic breadth wherein students are expected to meet a diverse set of distribution requirements in earning a baccalaureate degree. As knowledge, defined as mastery of a common curricular content, has diminished in importance as a distinguishing hallmark for liberal arts graduates the skills and attitudinal categories of outcomes have assumed a correspondingly elevated status.

It is now fashionable to speak of an "educated person" in terms of a specifiable set of skills or competencies, the applications of which transcend particular subject or content areas (Honnold 1997). At Founders College (as we shall refer to the site of the present research) these are identified in the College's assessment plan submitted as part of the institutional self-study for reaccreditation as including, among other things, the capacity to: "appreciate and participate in learning as a life-long pursuit...; achieve college-level competency in such fundamental academic skills as reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, thinking critically, using the technology of learning...; become conversant with the types of questions asked and the methods employed by scholars in various disciplines...; regard considerations of ethics and values as indispensable elements of human inquiry..." (Founders College 1997, 2-3). As these examples illustrate, it is not always possible to separate educational outcomes that are primarily *skills-based* from those fundamentally *attitudinal*. Progress on the knowledge and skills fronts often presumes preliminary development of an attitudinal/predispositional kind. For example, the University of Northern Iowa recently conducted a yearlong, campus-wide quest for consensus on

what constitute the key “qualities of an educated person.” The resulting list begins with “intellectually curious” and includes “courage — being motivated by vision versus fear; a sense of perspective (individual self-reflection and values); a temperament to take risks; tolerance for ambiguity; coping skills and transforming skills to deal with failure” (Honnold 1997, p.7). While the acquisition of knowledge and the enhancement of academic skills remain vital, they are certainly not the only items on higher education’s agenda of expected outcomes.

Are there any such subjective outcomes that can be considered distinctive to the mission of liberal arts colleges? While he was not writing about the liberal arts college *per se*, but rather “liberal learning” more broadly, Cardinal Newman in *The Idea of a University* ([1852] 1996) took strong exception with the tendency to equate a liberal education with the acquisition of a breadth of knowledge across arts and science curricula. Echoing Newman, A. Bartlett Giamatti greeted new undergraduates at Yale University (where he was then president) with the claim that truly liberal learning both presupposes and produces a certain “attitude of mind” in the learner vis-a-vis education itself. In the first place, liberal learning is to be distinguished by what it is not:

To study the liberal arts or the humanities is not necessarily to acquire a liberal education unless one studies these and allied subjects in a spirit that, as Newman has it, seeks no immediate sequel, that is independent of a profession's advantage. If you pursue the study of anything not for the intrinsic rewards of exercising and developing the power of the mind but because you press toward a professional goal, then you are pursuing not a liberal education but rather something else (Giamatti 1988, 119).

More positively, authentic liberal learning rests on a certain purity of motives on the part of its *practitioners*. “Learning for learning's sake” and the spirit of inquiry that it fosters are seen as part and parcel of a higher-order orientation to knowledge than more narrowly instrumental alternatives. This is not to suggest, however, that intrinsically motivated learning is *ipso facto* entirely void of instrumental value. “A liberal education rests on the supposition that our humanity is enriched by the pursuit of learning for its own sake; it is dedicated to the proposition that growth in thought, and in the power to think, increases the pleasure, breadth, and value of life” (Giamatti 1988, 120).

But if liberal learning in the deepest sense is less a matter of “content breadth” than a distinctive “spirit of inquiry,” then how might institutions committed to this ideal articulate such a notion? For purposes of communicating with current and prospective clientele, it is a decidedly easier proposition to define and promote liberal learning as synonymous with the liberal arts. And this no doubt accounts for the fact that prevailing conceptions and the communications with constituents to which these give rise are skewed in favor of knowledge and skills as learning outcomes. Liberal arts colleges are places where graduates acquire “well-rounded” educations in consequence of the breadth of their exposure to diverse arts

and science curricula. They are places that, by virtue of size, devote extraordinary emphasis to the development of academic skills (critical thinking and effective writing, in particular) as key learning outcomes.

Liberal arts colleges usually are not places which stake their claims of distinctive educational value on considerations cited by Newman, Giamatti and others (Arnstine 1995; Astin 1993; Dewey 1938; Boyer and Levine 1981; Canada 1999; Hersh 1999) as comprising the “heart and soul” of authentically liberal learning. It is not difficult to appreciate why. The kinds of “effects” or “outcomes” identified by these writers are, simply put, saturated with subjectivity. It is one thing to suggest that liberal learning entails a particular frame of mind, or spirit of inquiry, or subjective sensibility; it is quite another to move from the realm of such abstract ideas about subjective intangibles in principle to an operational plane on which their expression might be observed empirically (and assessed) in practice. Until this is done, however, those colleges which claim as their highest aspiration the cultivation of liberal learning will likely continue to languish in an increasingly competitive market in which the full value of their educational product is incompletely understood, imperfectly communicated and inadequately assessed in terms commonly associated with the collection of “objective” data.

### **Applying Q Methodology: Undergraduate Understandings of the Liberal Arts**

One point of entry into the assessment of subjective effects may well present itself in the understandings that students have at one such college about the nature of their educational experience. What goals do they see college helping them to achieve? How do students understand and measure educational value in pursuing these objectives? What stand out as the principal benefits to be extracted from a liberal arts experience? What obligations, if any, do they see themselves assuming as students embarked on a particular course of study? As part of a class project in a senior seminar at Founders College in the Spring of 1997, undergraduates were invited in interviews to share their understandings of the meaning of the liberal arts by commenting on their experiences as students in one such institution. The ensuing *concourse* (Stephenson 1978) encompassed several facets, ranging from motivation for attending such a school, to concerns about costs and claims and/or hopes about product value — all tapping in various ways common understandings of what constitutes a quality educational experience. In reducing the volume of such commentary to manageable proportions, care was taken to ensure that all topical referents were adequately represented, hence spanning questions of educational value or ends, on the one hand, to matters of means, on the other. Opinions on the purposes of the liberal arts were therefore included as were understandings of their meaning in principle and in practice with respect to the arts and science curricula, class size, academic standards and, finally, pedagogy. Fifty-four such statements were

drawn from the parent population, numbering nearly 200 in all, to comprise the "College Experience Q Sample."

Forty undergraduates at Founders College modeled their own opinions on such matters by performing Q sorts with these items in customary Q-technique fashion by ranking the items from +5 (most agree/most true of my college experience) to -5 (most disagree/least true of my college experience). Three additional students attending a large state university also supplied Q sorts, as did four members of the faculty and one administrator at Founders College. Correlated and factored (centroid method), the sorts yielded a five-factor solution with a varimax rotation. (A manual rotation produced a virtually identical solution.) As can be seen from Table 1, which contains the rotated factor matrix, only three participants provided sorts that failed to achieve significant loadings on at least one of the factors. One factor was defined solely by students at the state university, and for this reason it is omitted from the presentation to follow. These students are not drawn into the private liberal arts concourse. Much of what was distinguishing for the factor was outright hostility to any claims of special educational value for schools like Founders.

On one point there is virtually unanimous agreement across these four understandings: The student alone bears responsibility for the quality of his/her education. As noted below, when composite Q sorts are constructed from the defining variates for each factor, scores (ranging potentially from -5 [most disagree] to +5 [most agree]) for statements affirming individual responsibility are strongly positive and consistently so. That individuals are ultimately responsible for their own fates in life has been and remains a powerful premise in the American creed (Greenberg 1983). The same idea is central to the "Protestant ethic" as described by Weber (1959), and it bears noting in this connection that Founders is, in fact, a Lutheran college. It would be unwise to make too much of this seemingly pronounced consensus before we inspect the broader context in which this understanding is embedded.

<i>Factor</i>				<i>Statement</i>
1	2	3	4	
5	4	5	5	(28) Like anything else in life, you get out of college only as much as you put into it.
5	5	3	5	(32) Ultimately, the student alone is responsible for his/her own education. Professors can serve as facilitators, and they can model the skills they want to foster; but in the end, it's the student who must make use of these resources.

Often the ranking of a single statement in a Q sort is uninformative, or even contradictory, when viewed in isolation. It is necessary, rather, to look at the individual's entire constellation of responses, each of which can provide only a partial illumination of the relevant subjectivity. Viewing a response in context provides fuller insight, especially when that is bolstered,



Table 1. Rotated Factor Matrix for "College Experience" Study

I	Factor			Respondent
	2	3	4	
75	13	31	13	Psychology, sophomore
75	14	32	12	History, sophomore
70	-09	-07	-10	Poli. Sci./Comm. Arts, junior
65	33	26	05	Social Work, junior
46	-06	01	25	Accounting/Poli. Sci., junior
44	22	26	22	Social Work, freshman
44	12	28	21	Political Science, freshman
42	27	35	38	Elementary Ed., senior
41	30	31	-06	Music Ed., senior
02	<b>78</b>	12	18	Poli. Sci., senior
11	<b>76</b>	14	37	Social Science, faculty
19	<b>71</b>	18	14	Poli. Sci., junior
07	<b>69</b>	01	07	Poli. Sci., junior
22	<b>67</b>	-16	29	English, faculty
14	<b>62</b>	09	08	Business/Poli. Sci., senior
11	<b>62</b>	30	02	Social Science, faculty
26	<b>59</b>	-24	33	Senior Administrator
18	<b>58</b>	25	05	Comm. Arts/Poli. Sci., senior
29	<b>54</b>	32	37	Mathematics, faculty
29	<b>44</b>	22	26	Poli. Sci., freshman
09	04	<b>74</b>	04	Biology, freshman
38	-13	<b>65</b>	08	Comm. Arts, sophomore
15	15	<b>63</b>	39	Social Work, sophomore
01	12	<b>61</b>	-04	Social Work, junior
37	22	<b>57</b>	28	Comp. Science, freshman
23	20	<b>56</b>	30	Social Work, sophomore
28	11	<b>46</b>	-08	Marketing, senior
25	28	<b>46</b>	12	Secondary Science Ed., senior
23	29	18	<b>75</b>	Undecided, freshman
33	35	07	<b>57</b>	English, freshman
07	37	32	<b>42</b>	Accounting, senior
15	35	05	<b>47</b>	Poli.Sci/History/Religion, junior
18	<u>48</u>	<u>43</u>	09	Social Work, sophomore
<u>43</u>	<u>48</u>	-11	15	Music, junior
<u>55</u>	11	<u>45</u>	19	El. Edu., senior
31	<u>42</u>	<u>47</u>	11	Social Work, freshman
31	<u>44</u>	<u>50</u>	08	History, freshman
37	<u>44</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>42</u>	Social Work, junior
30	<u>44</u>	<u>55</u>	25	Poli. Sci., freshman
-04	<b>40</b>	11	21	Social Work, junior

Note: Respondents without significant loadings on one or more of these factors not shown. Defining variates shown in bold; mixed loaders are underlined.

as in this study, by sorter interviews and frequent observations of key responders within the setting being studied.

### **Factors 1 and 3: Instrumental Conceptions of College**

Treated in tandem because of their substantial similarities, factors 1 and 3 are defined by the Q sorts of nine and eight defining variates respectively (Q sorts with significant loadings on each factor alone). Factor 1 is comprised of sorts supplied by students from across the arts-and-sciences spectrum (including history and political science, education, social work and music) and ranging from freshmen through seniors in status. Factor 3 is also defined exclusively by students; however, the disciplinary range of its subscribers is less diverse. Aside from one Biology major (who is pre-medical), these students associated with factor 3 are embarked on a pre-professional course of study. Whether affiliated with programs in social work, education, marketing, computer science or communication arts, students on factor 3 now consider, at least for the time being, the B.A. as a terminal degree to be followed immediately by entrance into the work force.

Table 2 contains the more notable of the distinguishing statements (and their factor scores) for factors 1 and 3. Despite differences in key areas, the factors are in close accord on the primary purpose of a college education. First and foremost, college is (or should be) dedicated to the career preparation of its students. The motivation to attend college, therefore, is essentially extrinsic in character, based on labor-market considerations. In this market, the college assumes the task of producing human capital, and thus performs a vital credentialing function for its customers, both students and employers. Perhaps of greater interest is the pervasive influence of such market notions in calculating educational value more generally. As compared with public institutions, private liberal arts colleges are (allegedly) more selective, their academic standards and their price tags higher. Consequently, it "looks better on a resume" (Statement 15: Factor 1 score +4, Factor 3 score +2) if one is a graduate of the latter as opposed to the former.

When attention is turned to the teaching-learning process, factors 1 and 3 are alike to the extent that they regard it as quintessentially an enterprise of information exchange: teachers supply it and students aspire to ingest and retain it. Accordingly, the best professors are especially adept at "presenting their material in a well-organized, easy-to-remember manner. They also spruce up their presentations with interesting stories and an occasional joke to help students better retain the information" (49: +5, +4). While this would suggest a rather passive view of the student's role in the teaching-learning process, it is not unreservedly so. First, both factors find value in student participation in class discussions provided such involvement enhances the acquisition of information believed to lie at the heart of education.

### ***Factor 1: "Navigators of the Curricular Maze"***

Factors 1 and 3 part company on the wisdom and benefits of more genuinely dialogical forms of education. In relative terms, as will be noted, factor 3 is

Table 2. Selected Statements and Scores for Factors 1 and 3

<i>Factor</i>				<i>Statement</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	
5	-1	4	3	(49) The best professors present their material in a well-organized, easy-to-remember manner. They also spruce up their presentations with interesting stories and an occasional joke to help students better retain the information.
4	-2	4	-4	(6) First and foremost, college is meant to prepare an individual for his/her career so that they be productive members of society.
4	0	2	-1	(15) Getting a degree from a private college is more difficult and more expensive than getting one from a state school. Consequently, it looks better on a resume.
3	0	5	0	(11) The high cost of attending a small college means that students must demand their money's worth, that they are taught something useful during each and every class period.
1	-2	4	-2	(30) Class discussions are good only if they help you to better grasp and retain the information that the instructor is trying to communicate.
-4	-2	0	-3	(9) Points awarded for participation in class are bad because people just say stupid things to get the points. They rarely say anything meaningful.
2	-3	-4	3	(18) No one has explained to me why it is to my benefit to have to take so many required courses outside of my major simply because of the liberal arts.
2	1	-4	-1	(26) I do not believe attendance should be taken in any college course. It is childish and silly to require students to attend class.
2	2	5	2	(22) A really effective teacher must vary his/her teaching style and show a genuine interest in the students as well as the material.
-5	-3	-3	-3	(23) Many of today's controversial issues involve polarized opinions where most people will not be persuaded to change their minds. It's best therefore to avoid raising these issues in classes.
-4	-5	-2	-5	(35) Kids from big cities should attend large universities, and kids from small towns should attend small, private colleges.
-3	-4	0	-3	(12) We need to simplify and clarify the role expectations of faculty and students. That means returning to the basic idea that it is the job of teachers to teach and students to learn.
0	1	-4	5	(19) You learn more outside the classroom in college than you do in the classroom.

not entirely comfortable with the idea of students assuming an active, participatory role in their classes. Factor 1, on the other hand, is not opposed to efforts to foster active engagement by grading student performance in class discussion. This does not mean that factor 1 is a true-believing devotee of dialogical education and the conversational forms of engagement with ideas it tries to foster among students. Rather, the understanding is one in which the role of a college student is conceived in large part as “performance art.” Reminiscent of Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, persons aligned with factor 1 see college as a constellation of games, in which players have available to them a series of “selves” and “scripts” that are, in some measure, individually chosen and negotiated in concert with cohorts and authorities. One script apparently gives students the role of active class participant, and for *navigators* this is a fairly coveted role. But it is only a role, and those who catch themselves in the act of filling it are under few illusions about what it means. It is little more than a way of playing the game, of getting by as best one can in a contest where authentic engagement and deep satisfaction are rarely encountered and virtually never expected. A glimpse into the nature of this understanding can be gleaned from the remarks of the highest loader on factor 1, when queried about his strong rejection of a statement condemning graded class discussions: “Yes, I strongly disagreed with that statement, because talking in class means easy points. You get credit for just speaking up; you don’t necessarily have to have the right answer.”

From popular culture, the title character in the movie “Ferris Beuhler’s Day Off” is an apt, though admittedly exaggerated, caricature of the *navigator’s* sensibility. Ferris was a savvy, immensely popular high school student who had honed to a fine art the ability to survive the senseless, boring ordeal of high school by dint of his charm as an unabashed manipulator — of his peers, of adult authorities, of the system as a whole. Feeling a bit like “Ferris Beuhler” in being forced to assume a role that is, after all, dictated by societal and market forces over which one has little if any control, factor 1 “strikes the pose” and “talks the talk” appropriate to the role, finding little if anything in the assumed identity that is of lasting value in any deep, intrinsic sense. Armed with such an attitude, it is not surprising that *navigators* see little merit in curricular and class requirements bearing no direct perceptible relationship to extrinsic, marketable skills and attributes (6: +4, 15: +4, 18: +2, 20: +2, 36: +2, 41: -2)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The “performance” orientation taken by navigators is to be distinguished from a “mastery” orientation. As Dweck and Leggett (1988) indicate, this is essentially an extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation distinction. Moreover, according to experimental evidence, students adopting *performance orientations* are given to proving rather than improving their understandings and abilities; hence, they take fewer risks in their education than do students with *mastery orientations*. And with the suspension of incentive-reinforcement schedules (i.e., in the absence of grades, tests and the like), performance-oriented learners are less likely to persist in efforts to learn.

### **Factor 3: "Pre-professional Trainees"**

If *navigators* harbor an egoistic skepticism toward the personal relevance and value of requirements generally, the *pre-professional trainees* of factor 3 grant far greater deference to such prescriptions and those who make them. *Trainees* may not like the full range of requirements they must satisfy in completing their majors and their general education requirements, but they do not as a rule question the authority of faculty to establish them. They neither question the rationale advanced for the requirements, nor take issue with strict attendance requirements (18: -4, 26: -4).

Above all, *trainees* see college as career preparation. When queried in interviews about what distinguishes the kind of education they experience at Founders from that of students majoring in the same kinds of pre-professional programs at larger, less-expensive state universities, answers invariably emphasized the virtues of smallness unrelated to the liberal arts. Personal attention by caring faculty, a strong social support base, opportunities for extra-curricular involvement — these were the distinguishing hallmarks of the Founders experience. Only on further interrogation — and even then, not in all cases — did *trainees* speak to the curricular aspects of the liberal arts and then, usually, in cursory reference to the need to be "well-rounded" in dealing with the diversity of people they will likely encounter in their professions as teachers, social workers and the like.

Like *navigators*, *trainees* are pragmatists. For them, the most valued forms of learning are those that feature practical, useful knowledge. It might be nice to take more classes outside of one's major, but "one has to be realistic" as a secondary-education major put it. "If I had a choice, I'd definitely take more courses in the area that I will teach in (Biology and Chemistry) than I am able to now because of general education requirements. After all, which is going to be of a greater benefit to me after I graduate?" When asked whether the course requirements in education (i.e., Foundations, Ed Psych, Methods and the like) were more or less valuable in his view than General Education course work, he paused before saying that he thought so. "You're much more likely to apply what you learn in those courses. I don't think I can say the same thing about most of the courses I take to satisfy the Founders Plan (General Education Requirement)."

### **Factors 2 and 4: Liberal Arts Enthusiasts**

As with factors 1 and 3, there are clear points of convergence in the overall perspectives of factors 2 and 4 *vis-a-vis* the liberal arts, yet these two understandings are far from exact replicas of one another. This divergence is perhaps most strikingly revealed in the relative composition of the defining variates for the respective factors. On this score, factor 2 is especially distinctive as it includes among the ranks of its purely saturated contributors the Q sorts of *every non-student participant in this project*. Two of the four faculty members are social scientists; the third is a mathematician, while the fourth is a professor of English. Finally, the fifth non-student Q sort is from a

Table 3. Selected Statements and Scores for Factors 2 and 4

Factor				Statement
1	2	3	4	
-1	5	2	0	(45) Its many problems notwithstanding, the modern liberal-arts college still remains the best long-term investment one can make. There's simply no better way to stimulate life-long growth in creativity, communication skills, values and ethics.
-2	5	-1	2	(41) When thinking about the value of higher education in today's environment, we seem to be operating within a very narrow framework of "vocation" versus "learning for learning sake," an understandable but <u>false</u> dichotomy.
2	-2	2	3	(20) Obtaining a college education is merely a stepping stone. People have to do it in order to do what they really want later on in life.
0	2	-1	-3	(2) Liberal arts colleges are becoming pre-professional schools, inasmuch as they focus on preparing students for a career rather than providing a classical liberal arts education.
-1	3	-2	2	(24) In many respects, the full value of a liberal arts education is "wasted on the young." Young people fresh out of high school are preoccupied with huge pressures (particularly financial) that make "learning for its own sake" a dubious proposition.
0	-4	-1	-5	(10) We have to be realistic: the goal of turning out "well-rounded critical thinkers" is no longer sufficient in a highly competitive international economy. All colleges must focus first on preparing grads for a career.
-2	2	-2	4	(44) Students and professors alike are too <u>polite</u> with one another any more. Whether out of fear of receiving a poor grade or evaluation, they are abdicating their ethical obligations to challenge one another to defend ideas and deepen thinking.
-1	2	-1	1	(4) Higher education today has become a breeding ground for mediocrity and complacency. Students are mostly concerned with getting through with acceptable grades, professors with getting tenure.
-2	2	-2	1	(14) Students who are outspoken in class and who raise questions and voice strong opinions tend to incur the wrath of their fellow students who are more comfortable remaining silent.
0	1	-4	5	(19) You learn more outside the classroom in college than you do in the classroom.

high-ranking, senior administrator at the college. Seven students comprise the remainder of the defining variates for factor 2; interestingly, all seven happen to be political science majors. The four defining variates for factor 4 include two seniors (one from accounting, the other a political science/history/ religion major) and two freshmen (one in English, the other undecided).

**Factor 2: "Liberal Learning Practitioners"**

As can be surmised by the key statements distinguishing these viewpoints in Table 3, factor 2 constitutes a whole-hearted embrace of the liberal arts. These *Liberal Learning Practitioners* believe in the utter practicality of such an education, regarding it as still the "best investment" available in the current market of higher education. At the same time, they are manifestly uncomfortable with the hegemony of market-based metaphors as attempts to capture and convey that value. For one thing, factor 2's adherents are convinced that such terminology fosters dangerously dualistic thinking (e.g. 41, +5) in which educational value comes to be appraised *either* as holding intrinsic value ("as learning for the sake of learning") *or* as extrinsically useful (as in preparing students for the "real world" of career and vocation).

This artificial dichotomy, factor 2 fears, frames a debate over educational value wherein the "qualities of mind" ostensibly fostered by liberal learning are, if not ignored altogether, consigned to an inconsequential status as derivative effects rather than fundamental learning outcomes (38: +1, 41: +5, 42: -4, 44: +2, 45: +5, 46: +4, 50: +1, 52: +3). Indeed, implicit in the enthusiasm for the liberal arts shown by factor 2 is deep concern that its own notions of educational value are neither well understood nor widely appreciated. Those who share the factor 2 perspective worry that liberal arts colleges such as Founders, under enormous pressures to accommodate market forces and the understandings they foster, will find themselves "forced" to assume strategies of institutional survival which risk sacrificing the intellectual ideals of "classical liberal arts" learning altogether.

Despite these worries, factor 2 finds much in its educational experience that is praiseworthy. When it works for them, learning assumes the character of an effortless, aesthetic experience suffused with feelings of playfulness and subjective pleasure. The sense of effortlessness, however, is far from literal; on the contrary, the intense yet infrequent experiences of elation seem critically tied to equally intense, more prolonged periods of concentration and effort. "Intellectual fun," as one student aligned with factor 2 put it, is "finding yourself in a group of people who have struggled to understand a difficult text and reaching, through a vigorous exchange of views, a deeper understanding of what the author was trying to say, along with a deeper understanding of why it is important." In the process, as another student explained, "you sort of let go of the fear of being wrong and, in fact, sometimes you want to be proven wrong in your own understanding because you know then that you have really learned something."

Undergirding this understanding of education, then, is a deep appreciation for the discursive, collaborative nature of liberal learning. Indeed, the term liberal learning “*practitioner*” in this connection is taken from Alisdair MacIntyre’s (1981) concept of a practice as developed in his book *After Virtue*. Practices, according to MacIntyre, are particular kinds of complex, cooperative human activities that establish their own standards of excellence and, in turn, are defined in part by those standards. Moreover, each practice establishes its own set of “goods” and to engage in the practice is to pursue these goods to which are attached common meaning and understanding. For persons who identify with factor 2, the knowledge produced by education is considered an end in itself or, possibly, as “an essential ingredient in the making of mature, responsible citizens” (Schwartz 1994, 183). From this standpoint, to the extent that the goal of education shifts to one primarily designed to serve the material self-interest of its participants, then the nature of the practice will have transformed as well. In order to achieve durability, the understanding of education endorsed by factor 2 requires a “critical mass” of like-minded individuals.

#### ***Factor 4: “Ambivalent Apprentices”***

Factor 4 does not share with factor 2 a critical obsession with the pernicious effects of market forces and their attendant metaphors on public perceptions of value in institutions of higher learning. Nor is it as enamored with the idea of learning for learning’s sake, i.e., the instinsically motivated pursuit of knowledge, that also sets factor 2 apart from the others. In other respects, however, factors 2 and 4 have much in common. They share a faith in the inherent practicality of a liberal arts degree even in equipping college graduates with what they need to flourish in a rapidly transforming, highly competitive global economy. Although factor 4 does not resonate with the idea of liberal learning as intrinsically rewarding, its brand of pragmatic instrumentalism stresses goals and ends in higher education that are in harmony with outcomes endorsed by factor 2 (6: -4, 10: -5, 37: -1, 40: +4, 46: +2, 47: 0). Likewise, factor 4 also doubts that such outcomes will warrant much respect from society-at-large (2: -3, 31: +4, 38: -1, 41: +2, 52: +3).

In addition, factors 2 and 4 are alike in the doubts they harbor about the vitality of intellectual life at places like Founders. There is a sense that higher education in general is well on its way to becoming a vast breeding ground for mediocrity and complacency, where neither students nor faculty seem inclined to truly challenge one another to “defend ideas and deepen thinking,” for fear of reprisals or repercussions — in the one case in terms of grades, in the other in terms of tenure. Too frequently, instead of serving as vibrant sites for a genuinely “free marketplace of ideas,” classrooms become stale settings in which students authentically engaged by ideas and/or by instructors feel constrained to censor public expression of such interest for fear of violating tacit norms of their peers, and where the whole enterprise is papered over by a disingenuous, superficial veneer of politeness.



Factor 4 differs from factor 2 in key respects. Like factor 1, factor 4 is ambivalent at best in attitude toward the range and volume of liberal arts (general education) requirements at Founders (factor 1 25: 0; factor 4 18: +3, 42: +2; both 3: +3, +3; 6: 4, -4; 10: 0, -5; 31: -1, +4; 52: -4, +4). No one has yet been able to explain to them in a convincing manner "why it is to their benefit" to have to take such a wide variety of such courses outside their majors. The aversive feelings generated by general education requirements are mitigated somewhat by relatively strong, albeit abstract, commitments to the value of liberal arts. The notions of value here reflect an appreciation for the quality of the educational experience in skill development (critical thinking and communication) as well as in promoting self-confidence. Finally, much more than the other factors, factor 4 believes in the educational efficacy of extra-curricular experiences at places like Founders. "You learn more outside of the classroom than you do inside the classroom." (19) is given a +5 ranking in the factor array for *apprentices*.

### Alternative Understandings as Learning Discourses

To the extent that these factors reflect diverse understandings of the nature and value of the liberal arts — encompassing stylized views of the purposes and optimal processes of education as well — they constitute distinct "learning discourses." A *discourse*, in this sense, may be defined formally as "a shared set of capabilities enabling the assemblage of bits of sensory input (words, sentences, etc.) into coherent wholes (or 'texts' as they are sometimes called)" (Dryzek 1994, 222). More simply, a discourse is a schematized understanding of a particular domain. The best known accounts of discourses and their variation over time have been developed by Michel Foucault in his histories of discourses pertaining to crime, punishment, madness, and sexuality. More recently, John Dryzek (political science, University of Melbourne) has employed Q technique in research identifying *political discourses* (Dryzek 1994; Dryzek and Berejikian 1993; Dryzek 1996). The first of these works begins with the simple proposition that "democracy is, in large measure, what people make of it. ... And what citizens *think* they are doing as they encounter (or choose not to encounter) politics makes a lot of difference to the kind of politics that results" (Dryzek 1994, 221). Real-world democratic prospects are thus powerfully constrained by the character and the compatibility of the "discourses of democracy" to which citizens in any given political order actually subscribe. In the American and Australian cases, Dryzek finds several democratic discourses; some are complementary and others bear an antagonistic relationship to one another. In the latter instances conversational possibilities, as well as democratic-institutional prospects, are stunted because adherents of opposing discourses understand and see the world so differently.

Like democracy, college is to a large extent what its *practitioners* make of it. In this respect it seems reasonable to view the four understandings

of college reported in this paper as representing distinct “learning discourses.” Each discourse presupposes a unique configuration of beliefs regarding an educational *ontology* (the basic entities whose existence is recognized); *agency* (with some entities ascribed the power to act, and others not); *motives* attributed to the agents; and the taken-for-granted *relationships* among the entities, such as hierarchies or equalities based on ability or role differences. Table 4 contains an abbreviated account of the four factors as discourses of learning.

Reduced (radically) to essentials in this fashion, the four discourses clearly part company in their basic understandings not only of the liberal arts but also the fundamental purposes of the entire undergraduate experience. While *navigators* and *trainees* are alike in their predisposition to view this experience in instrumental terms, as mere means to larger market-based ends, they diverge in the appraisals of their own role in the process of “adding value” to their college degree. For *trainees* this entails a relatively prosaic, passive role orientation, where they seek credentialing in accordance with what they deem to be the specifications of legitimate accrediting authorities. Knowledge is understood as anchored in expertise and established practice; as such, it is not subject to dispute or debate. *Navigators* display a more “postmodern” sensibility, treating knowledge claims as often contestable yet remaining unconvinced of human capacities to move beyond divergent claims to approximate “truth” in any truly meaningful sense.

*Practitioners* also see knowledge in fluid, dialectical terms like their *navigator* colleagues but unlike *trainees*. They differ from *navigators* to the extent that they see truth as attainable and value its pursuit as an intrinsic good apart from what learning can do in adding market value and “looking good on one’s resume.” For *practitioners* and *apprentices* real learning is best served by collaborative, conversational pedagogies wherein ideas and arguments can be tested in the “free marketplace of ideas.” Truth appears more nearly equivalent to winning arguments. Its pursuit grants scant privilege independent of good reasons to assertions of expertise or subject matter authority. Each of these understandings insists that individual learners bear ultimate responsibility for their own learning, yet the precise meaning and practice differs in each instance. If college is truly what we make of it, then we might safely say that at Founders there are at least four predispositional pathways available to students for making the most of their undergraduate experience.

**Table 4. Four Learning Discourses at Founders**

<b>Discourse</b>	<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Motives</b>	<b>Relationships</b>
<b>Navigators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructors as “allocators of value”</li> <li>• Onerous curricular requirements</li> <li>• “Resume Value”</li> </ul>	egoistic individuals performance	rational choice self-interest extrinsic	market coordination and competition role-taking
<b>Practitioners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers, students as co-inquirers</li> <li>• Texts, ideas</li> <li>• Critical, collaborative engagement</li> <li>• Learning as empowerment</li> </ul>	potentially all “Learning Community”	mastery public good intrinsic	democratic, egalitarian “commonwealth of mutual difference”
<b>Trainees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career preparation/ pre-professional training</li> <li>• Teaching as informational</li> <li>• Lib Arts as breadth</li> <li>• Coursework/classroom sovereign</li> </ul>	authority & expertise	certification/ credentialing extrinsic	hierarchical deference to authority
<b>Apprentices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal arts as breadth and intensive instruction</li> <li>• Extracurriculars</li> <li>• Social Life</li> <li>• Ambivalence</li> </ul>	potentially all	mixed	cooperative and competitive

## Where to from Here? Conclusions, Caveats, Implications

If the understandings that students come to acquire toward the character of their college experience are as critical as the foregoing assumes, it is worth considering what conclusions can be drawn and what particular lines of further research are recommended by these findings. Given the pilot character of this study, the usual disclaimers are in order regarding the non-random character of the respondent sample and the limitations this poses for “generalizing” beyond the individuals participating in this research. This looms especially large concerning the small number and homogeneity of non-student participants. Faculty members representing “pre-professional” programs at Founders were not involved in this study, and nothing can be said or inferred about how they might affiliate with these factors. We simply do not know whether such faculty would display greater affinities for the liberal learning *practitioners* (factor 2) on which arts-and-science faculty are situated, or for *trainees* (factor 3) with whom most pre-professional students are aligned. This is an empirical question; and, as such, it can only be answered through additional research.

Implicit in the idea of learning discourses, as schematic understandings of what education is and should be, is the notion that they constitute subtle yet powerful learning outcomes in their own right. They can be seen as exercising appreciable effects on student behaviors and educational development more generally over the course of a college education. Thus liberal learning *practitioners*, by this line of reckoning, extract a qualitatively different set of experiences from their college educations than do *navigators* or *trainees*. At issue here are differential predisposition toward learning to which Giamatti and others have drawn attention as defining the soul of liberal learning. To *practitioners*, such learning can be a liberating, empowering experience for the learner. At the core of this experience is a readiness to respond affirmatively and energetically to learning opportunities reflecting a shared understanding of education's ultimate purposes and preferred pedagogies. Valuable learning opportunities are occasions in which ideas can be explored, questioned and debated within a context of conversational encounter and engagement. The tenor of inquiry is critical yet open, while being playful and inherently pleasurable in a subjective sense. Placed in an alternative context embedded in a different understanding, e.g., one in harmony with the expectations of *trainees*, *practitioners* would likely feel frustrated rather than engaged. Conversely, when instructional purposes are altered to underscore the acquisition of information and teaching takes on a more narrative tone, *trainees* would likely find their comfort levels dramatically elevated in comparison with where free-wheeling, dialogical courses are more likely to appeal to *practitioners*.

Such possibilities imply the presence of a developmental progression in the relationship between and among the learning discourses we have discovered. The discourse represented by *liberal learning practitioners*

arguably signifies a more “developmentally-advanced understanding” than each of the remaining alternatives. Why should this be so? In the first place, the quality of the subjectivity it represents bears close affinity to the attitudinal desiderata for authentic liberal learning posed by Giamatti and others. Circumstantial evidence from the present study offers a second line of defense for such a claim. After all, the factor 2 *practitioners* do include among their ranks all five of the participants in this research (faculty/administrators) who hold advanced degrees. Moreover, the students who emerged alongside their elder counterparts to anchor factor 2 are upper-division (5 seniors, 2 juniors) political science majors enrolled at the time in the capstone seminar under whose aegis this research was conducted.<sup>3</sup> Not all students in this seminar were found to load on factor 2. Two produced Q sorts that were among the highest loadings on factor 1; one was loaded significantly on factor 4. All three liberal arts “non-enthusiasts” were juniors at the time of the research. Taken together, these considerations support a two-fold claim *vis-a-vis* the subjective understanding contained in factor 2: (1) it suggests a more “advanced” understanding of the liberal arts than held by the others; and (2) it is an understanding that is itself *learned*.

In light of such developmental possibilities, it is also conceivable that the orientations of *navigators* (factor 1) and *apprentices* (factor 4) represent transient way-stations along a maturational course en route to either factor 2 or factor 3. This possibility assumes that the ambivalence of factor 4 will likely be experienced as discomforting and therefore not persist indefinitely. This also presumes that the gamesmanship of factor 1 will give way to sincere forms of engagement as individuals of this mindset begin to “find themselves” and replace the unwanted layers of self-presentation with what is truly of interest to them as learners. But until such claims withstand the rigors of further research, we can only speculate about such matters.

We now know very little about the relative malleability or durability of these understandings over time. While the argument advanced here presupposes that learning discourses are themselves learned over the course of a college education, we cannot automatically dismiss alternative understandings. Indeed, at this point we cannot reject the possibility that students may bring these understandings with them as they *enter* college and see them “crystallize” at the point of choosing a major. If the meaning one ascribes to one’s education reflects and embraces considerations of value and valuing that are themselves sensitive to educational effects, then it would be worthwhile to study whether the educational process is

<sup>3</sup> It may be worth noting in this connection that the seminar in which students were enrolled was, in substantial measure, designed by students themselves through negotiation with the course instructor. In addition, pass-no credit grading was used in lieu of standard letter grades. It is possible, therefore, that the presence of many of these students on factor 2 was a product of the “priming effects” of their experience with this particular seminar. If so, it is debatable whether the effect here is evidence of a dramatic educational impact or mere artifact. Obviously, this would benefit from additional research.

affected when students and faculty encounter one another as proponents of similar or divergent learning discourses. Prior work on the role of student learning style *vis-a-vis* faculty instructional style has been inconclusive on the effects of congruence vs. incongruence insofar as student ratings of instruction are concerned (Thomas, Ribich, and Freie 1982; Reiher 1996). The teaching effectiveness of faculty members with strong affinities for the dialogical engagement central to students on factor 2 might not be rated as highly by students on factor 3.

Finally, we need to ask more pointed questions in further research aimed at highlighting connections between subjective understandings of college and various "objective" measures of academic progress and performance. Are students with affinities for factor 2 significantly more likely to pursue post-graduate learning opportunities than are others? Do rival understandings of college "correlate" with other behavioral measures of student learning outcomes? Do they bear any relationship to alumni attitudes about college expressed in later years? Until serious efforts are mounted to address questions such as these, a healthy skepticism must persist about the capacities of prevailing modes of assessment to adequately capture the full range of subjective effects of college on its graduates. Until then there is no reason to expect that the corrosive cynicism now undercutting public appreciation for liberal arts colleges will soon subside.

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## Appendix

## Statements and Rank Factor Scores

No.	Statements	Factors:			
		1	2	3	4
1	Let's face it, hardly anyone <i>chooses</i> to attend college today. You can opt not to, but you might as well sign an oath of poverty because a college degree is an absolute necessity to today's job market.	3	0	0	3
2	Many liberal arts colleges like Founders are becoming professional schools, inasmuch as the focus is on preparing students for a career rather than providing a classical liberal arts education.	0	2	-1	-3
3	The great advantage of a small liberal arts college is the close contact it allows between members of the learning community, teachers and students alike. This makes possible the free and genuine exchange of ideas, the core of liberal learning.	3	4	4	3
4	Higher education today has become a breeding ground for mediocrity and complacency. For the most part students are concerned with getting through with acceptable grades, professors with getting tenure.	-1	2	-1	1
5	The traditional lecture format is hopelessly out of date. Now more than ever, there is a need to foster more "dialogical" approaches to teaching and learning.	1	2	1	1
6	First and foremost, college is meant to prepare an individual for his/her career so that they may be productive members of society.	4	-2	4	-4
7	Only 5% of what you learn in college really applies to real life.	-5	-3	-5	-4
8	Professors should go back to the bell curve for determining students' grades. The grade inflation we now have is pathetic, and it's only going to get worse unless we do something radical about it.	-3	1	-3	-4
9	Points awarded for participation in class are bad because people just stay stupid things to get the points. They rarely, if ever, say anything meaningful.	-4	-2	0	-3
10	We have to be realistic: the goal of turning out "well-rounded, critical thinkers" is no longer sufficient in a highly competitive international economy. All colleges, liberal arts or not, must focus first on preparing grads for a career.	0	-4	-1	-5
11	The high cost of attending a small college means that students must demand that they get their money's worth, that they are taught something useful during each and every class period.	3	0	5	0
12	We need to simplify and clarify the role expectations of faculty and students. That means returning to the basic idea that it is the job of teachers to teach and students to learn.	-3	-4	1	-2
13	The roots of our nation's educational problems do not lie in our colleges and universities; they are found at the elementary and secondary levels. Until they are fixed, colleges will suffer because too many unprepared students are admitted.	2	3	0	2
14	Students who are outspoken in class and who raise questions and voice strong opinions tend to incur the wrath of their fellow students who are more comfortable remaining silent.	-2	2	-2	1



No.	Statements	Factors:			
		1	2	3	4
15	Getting a degree from a private college is more difficult <i>and</i> more expensive than getting one from a state school. Consequently, it looks better on a resume.	4	0	2	-1
16	Professors should pay special attention to making students feel comfortable so that students find it safe to speak out in class.	1	-2	3	1
17	Professors who claim to value differences in viewpoints in class settings are quite often not being completely honest as it is equally clear that they regard their own viewpoint as the only valid one on many issues.	1	0	0	-1
18	No one has been able to explain to me in plain terms why it is to my benefit to have to take so many required courses outside of my major simply because this is a liberal arts college.	2	-3	-4	3
19	You learn more outside of the classroom in college than you do in the classroom.	0	1	-4	5
20	Obtaining a college education is merely a stepping stone. I have to do it in order to do what I really want later on in life.	2	-2	2	3
21	In small classes, everyone participates because there aren't enough people to hide behind and slide by. There is too much responsibility and pressure forced on you in small classes.	-3	-1	-2	0
22	A really effective professor must vary his/her teaching style and show a genuine interest in the students as well as the material.	2	2	5	-2
23	Many of today's controversial issues (abortion, homosexuality, affirmative action) involve polarized opinions where most people will not be persuaded to change their minds. It's therefore best simply to avoid addressing these issues in classes.	-5	-3	-3	-3
24	In many respects, the full value of a liberal arts education is "wasted on the young." Young people fresh out of high school are preoccupied with huge pressures (particularly financial) that make "learning for its own sake" a dubious proposition.	-1	3	-2	2
25	For me, the real value of the liberal arts college has nothing to do with the curricular requirement that I take courses outside my major. Rather, it has to do with the quality of the personal attention and teaching I will receive in my major courses.	0	-1	1	1
26	I do not believe attendance should be required or taken in any college course. It is childish and silly to require students to attend class.	1	1	4	-1
27	Professors should make copies of their lecture notes and their overheads and allow the bookstore to sell these to students. Then, if the students decide that there are better things to do with their time than attending class, they should be free to do so.	-3	-2	-5	-3
28	Like anything else in life, you get out of college only as much as you put into it.	5	4	5	5
29	Tenure for professors is an antiquated and absurd practice. It makes it impossible to get rid of a lot of teachers who are no longer able to perform in the classroom. Tenure should be abolished for the betterment of colleges like Founders.	0	-1	-3	0
30	Class discussions are good only if they help you to better grasp and retain the information that the instructor is trying to communicate.	1	-2	4	-2

No.	Statements	Factors:			
		1	2	3	4
31	In all honesty, I expect that many of the benefits I will derive from a liberal arts education will not become apparent to me until I've been out in the "real world" for awhile.	-1	1	1	4
32	Ultimately, the student alone is responsible for his/her education. Professors can serve as facilitators, and they can model the skills they want to foster; but in the end, it is the student who must make use of these resources.	5	5	3	5
33	The educational dividends of discussions—where students of opposing views engage one in another to the mutual benefit of all—are vastly overrated. Rarely are the benefits equal to the costs of hurt feelings and animosity that too often result.	-2	-5	-3	-1
34	The ideal professor should have neat hair and be a snazzy dresser.	-5	-4	-2	-5
35	Kids from big cities should attend large universities, and kids from small towns should attend small, private colleges.	-4	-5	-2	-5
36	At a liberal arts college, the academic demands are quite a bit more intense than at state universities. Consequently, if you're looking to party while in college, you're probably in the wrong place if you're not attending a state university.	2	-1	2	-3
37	In today's competitive world, liberal arts colleges cannot afford to hole up in their Ivory Towers and avoid hard questions of practicality. We need less philosophizing and more practical programming, such as internships and the like.	1	-1	0	-1
38	It may be true that the liberal arts college is unsurpassed in its ability to teach students to think on their own. The sad truth, however, is that this is not a very marketable quality in today's job market.	-2	1	-5	-1
39	For the vast majority of American families and young people today, financial considerations have made a classical liberal arts education, quite simply, an unaffordable luxury.	3	3	-1	-2
40	The complex challenges facing the globe now underscore how immensely practical the liberal arts college is if it can remain true to its mission of producing people of strong character with diverse skills and a capacity for lifelong learning.	3	3	2	4
41	When thinking about the value of higher education in today's environment, we seem to be operating within a very narrow framework of "vocation" versus "learning for learning's sake," an understandable but <i>false</i> dichotomy.	-2	5	-1	2
42	If I'm going to be an accountant or a social worker or some other kind of professional, why should I care what someone like Socrates or James Madison was <i>really</i> trying to say centuries ago?	-4	-4	-4	2
43	If I'm honest with myself and my peers, I will confess that they faculty who design the general education requirements actually do so with my and others' best interests in mind, even if those sometimes collide with our own preferences.	-1	4	3	2
44	Students and professors alike are too <i>polite</i> with one another any more. Whether out of fear of receiving a poor grade or evaluation, they are abdicating their ethical obligations to challenge one another to defend ideas and deepen thinking.	-2	2	-2	4

No.	Statements	Factors:			
		1	2	3	4
45	Its many problems notwithstanding, the modern liberal arts college still remains the best long-term educational investment one can make. There's simply no better way to stimulate life-long growth in creativity, communication skills, values and ethics.	-1	5	2	0
46	Now more than ever, private colleges need to buck prevailing trends and stand by their principles—including a concern with community, spiritual well-being, ethical reflection, and principled citizenship.	4	4	2	2
47	Proponents of the traditional liberal arts need to quit resting on their laurels, reciting empty clichés about well-rounded persons. And within the curriculum there should be much more emphasis on <i>useful</i> knowledge.	-1	-3	0	0
48	I do not pay tuition to listen to the opinions of my peers. My classmates are entitled to their opinions on things, but with limited time available to cover ever-expanding bodies of knowledge, students' perspectives should be kept to themselves.	-3	-5	-3	-2
49	The best professors present their material in a well-organized, easy-to-remember manner. They also spruce up their presentations with interesting stories and an occasional joke to help students better retain the information.	5	-1	4	3
50	One of the under-appreciated advantages of the private liberal arts college is that the students it attracts tend to be far above average in ability and interest, which in turn means that students learn a great deal from one another.	0	1	1	1
51	The professor should always be the smartest person in the classroom.	-2	-3	1	-4
52	It may be sad but it's nonetheless true that very few of the conversations that take place among students outside of classes center on ideas and issues professors spend their time examining within the classroom.	-4	3	3	4
53	Sure, I'd love to be able to take courses that strike me as interesting outside of my major. But the fact is, I have to worry about finding gainful employment after graduation. My course selections are made accordingly.	1	0	3	-2
54	Profs should take time to get to know students beyond the classroom. They should be interested in the students' extracurricular activities.	4	0	1	0