

THE HUMANIST ON CAMPUS: Continuity and Change

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American Council of Learned Societies

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Contributors

Denis Donoghue is Henry James Professor of English and American Letters and University Professor at New York University. He received degrees from University College, Dublin, where he served as Professor of Modern English and American literature. Later, he served as University Lecturer in English at Cambridge University and was a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Professor Donoghue has held numerous lectureships, including most recently the Alexander Lectureship at the University of Toronto and the Charles Stewart Parnell Lectureship in Irish Studies at Magdalen College, Cambridge. His books include *Connoisseurs of Chaos: Ideas of Order in Modern American Poetry*; *Yeats*; *Ferocious Alphabets*; *We Irish: The Pure Good of Theory*; *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls*; and *The Practice of Reading*. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the Royal Society of Literature, and has won fellowships from the National Humanities Center, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the American Council of Learned Societies. Professor Donoghue was an ACLS American Studies Fellow in 1963-64.

Lynn Hunt is Annenberg Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She received degrees in History from Carleton College and Stanford University. She is the author of the prize-winning *Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786-1790*; *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*; and *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, and has edited a number of volumes, including *The New Cultural History*; *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*; and *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*. She has served as president of the Society for French Historical Studies and on the advisory board of the Stanford Humanities Center. Professor Hunt has been named to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has won fellowships from the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the American Council of Learned Societies. Professor Hunt was an ACLS Fellow in 1979-80.

Lucius Outlaw is T. Wistar Brown Professor and former Chair of Philosophy at Haverford College. He recently served two years as The Honorable David S. Nelson Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, where he earned his doctorate after being awarded his B.A. at Fisk University. A Danforth Associate, he has been a distinguished visiting professor at many colleges and universities including The New School for

Music in Philadelphia, and Spelman, Howard, and Hamilton Colleges. A scholar of African and of African-American philosophy, Professor Outlaw also has strong interests in continental phenomenology and hermeneutics and in social and political philosophy. A collection of his essays entitled *On Race and Philosophy* was published by Routledge in 1996. He is currently at work on a volume entitled *Race, Reason, and Order*. Professor Outlaw was an ACLS Fellow in 1995-96.

Judith Shapiro is President of Barnard College. An anthropologist whose degrees are from Brandeis and Columbia Universities, she has had an important influence on the development of Women's Studies and has written extensively on sexuality and gender. Before assuming the Barnard presidency, she taught for many years at Bryn Mawr College, serving as Chair of the Department of Anthropology, Acting Dean of the Undergraduate College, and eight years as Provost. She has been a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, The Women's Forum, and the National Advisory Committee of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation; has served as Chair of the Consortium on Financing Higher Education, as President of the American Ethnological Society, and on the Boards of the American Anthropological Association, Survival International, and the Fund for the City of New York. She has won fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the American Council of Learned Societies. President Shapiro was an ACLS Fellow in 1981-82.

Robert Weisbuch (Moderator) is President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. He received degrees in English from Wesleyan University and Yale University. Before assuming the presidency of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation in 1997, he had a long association with the University of Michigan, where he began his teaching career in 1972, later serving as Chair of the English Department and Associate Vice-President for Research. He went on to serve as Associate Dean for Faculty Programs and Interim Dean of the University's Rackham School of Graduate Studies. He continues to hold the Arthur F. Thurnau Professorship for Professorial Excellence. His books include *Emily Dickinson's Poetry* and *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*. He is currently at work on *American Radio: A History of Programs and Programming*, a book and audiotape set to be published by The University of Wisconsin Press. President Weisbuch was an ACLS Fellow in 1976-77.

Introduction

The public program of the 1998 ACLS Annual Meeting considered the place of the Humanist on campus and explored aspects of continuity and change. Our four panelists and moderator all received ACLS Fellowships at some point in their careers: we think it appropriate to publicize this fact, since our more than 4,000 ACLS Fellows constitute a powerful academic presence on their campuses, valued both for the distinctiveness of their voices as well as for their notable contributions as scholars and as educators.

In a thoughtful study of the research university in the Fall 1993 issue of *Daedalus*, Jonathan Cole observed that the sense of connectedness between scholars and their campuses is weaker today than at any point in the past. We encouraged panelists to address the questions: what forces cement, what forces attenuate, the ties between the scholar and the campus? What changes are detectable over time, and what signs of impending change might be noted as we look to the future?

Other questions present themselves. What do we mean today by an “academic community” and how do Humanists contribute to it? Might one helpfully distinguish between “cosmopolitan” tendencies of scholars and scholarship (list-servs and other electronic forms of communication among scholars, the proliferation of scholarly conferences and meetings, not just off-campus but around the world, much of this broadening but much of it facilitating the creation of even more scholarly sub-groups and specialized discourses) and “local” ties (mainly, but far from exclusively, to departments, which increasingly have become only appointing and administrative units, not intellectual centers)? Is it reasonable to suppose that effective, self-confident institutions are those in which “cosmopolitan” scholars are also “local” scholars, participating actively in institutional life?

What impact have campus-based Humanities Centers—now nearly 90 in number—had in improving scholarly communication and understanding across fields and departments, and upon the undergraduate and graduate curricula? Do graduate education and scholarship operate as centrifugal forces, driving faculty away from a sense of basic institutional purpose? Are Humanities faculty willing to/capable of working collaboratively to shape the overall curriculum of the first two undergraduate years, and if so, to participate actively in the more synthetic, integrative course offerings that they shape?

Lynn Hunt’s essay in *What’s Happened to the Humanities* (A. Kernan, ed., Princeton, 1997) raises a number of suggestive questions. About academic demography and labor markets, for example: what are the implications of Humanities fields’ successfully attracting greater numbers of women into the academy, but failing to attract greater numbers of minorities? Or, to the degree

that the recent “theoretical turn” in humanistic scholarship is largely generational, what will successfully bridge the divide between junior and senior colleagues, especially since the older forms of academic socialization (including senior faculty offering hospitality to younger colleagues) have given way to a world of two-career households, and to the disappearance of spouses or partners able to take the time to entertain? And, pertinent to all of the above: does institutional typology require us to think differently about the above questions? That is to say, how far are conditions prevailing on research university campuses valid also in liberal arts colleges, or in community colleges?

Of course, it is easy enough to raise such questions, and to sail serenely past the controversies inherent in nearly all of them. Our panelists and our moderator—as was to have been expected—engaged some of these issues, ignored others, and (best of all) introduced additional themes well worth our attention. The ACLS is grateful to them all, and is pleased to present their contributions in this Occasional Paper.

— John H. D’Arms, President
American Council of Learned Societies

The Humanist on Campus—and Off-Kilter

Robert Weisbuch, Moderator
President,
Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

Thirty, even twenty years ago, this would have been a dull topic, or at least a self-congratulatory one. The humanist was the big man, or woman, on campus, standing at the very center of local academic life. While scientists struggled with a situation in which research was widely separated from teaching—one physicist remarked to me, “every second I spend teaching an undergraduate course is money out of my wallet”—, the humanist enjoyed all sorts of natural synergies between research and teaching and was often lauded by college administrators for pedagogical energy and campus citizenship. Terms like “a college education” and “the liberal arts” seemed nearly synonymous with the Humanities, the clearly assumed center of higher education.

Today, we live in a nation where there are 762 accredited cybercolleges; where most of the indices of support for the humanities have pointed decisively downward over the last few decades; where the salary differentials between humanists and our colleagues in the social and physical and life sciences, much less the professional schools, have become enormous; and where the ratio of dignified academic jobs to the number of doctoral graduates is perhaps one to three even when we count optimistically.

The result is an authentically new degree of bitterness toward the college and even toward each other. Our situation may render even those qualities of our disciplines that might give us a centrality on the local campus potentially dangerous and demeaning. Of course, one says, we are always called on and counted upon to teach well and teach endlessly, but that is because the university doesn't take our scholarship seriously. To college administrations, we exist as an economic drain, with our near-zero capacity to generate cost recovery or technological-transfer revenues. Thus we must lessen our subsidized and parasitical drag upon the institution by generating credit hours and

being good girls and boys. Even our communal enthusiasm takes on the appearance of self-denigration in such an atmosphere; and if our academic citizenship flags, that is because, as all agreed at a recent meeting of college groups, well, that is because of *you*—the disciplinary associations and their emphasis on scholarly prestige. (In truth, those faculty who are most professionally active are also most often those who teach and contribute service most effectively and generously; but bias refuses this truth and increases the potential for resentment of our best colleagues.)

More largely, not only do the humanities seem far less surely the center of a liberal arts education, but the liberal arts also seem less surely the center of education generally, which has grown remarkably careerist. “Not much action there,” a group of graduate school deans agreed about the humanities in a conversation a few years ago, one where most of us were ourselves humanists; and we went on to note that the scientists would come to the graduate school to propose while the humanities chairs seemed to come only to complain. Of course, since many of us were humanists, we ourselves were complaining.

One piece of good news emerges in all of this: Our topic, “The Humanist on the Campus,” is no longer boring—or if it is so during these proceedings, that is our fault. Small chance of that, I think, given our speakers. They will tell us, I hope, how to stop complaining and start proposing, for what is at stake is education’s soul.

In My Time

Denis Donoghue

*Henry James Professor of English and American Letters
and University Professor,
New York University*

Thirty-five years ago or thereabouts I was a young man doing his best to get along in the world. I had a solid job—tenured, pensionable, not munificently paid but not at starvation wages either—an assistant lectureship in the English Department at University College, Dublin. Someone told me about the ACLS. More immediately to the point, I heard that the Council made available to foreign scholars a number of fellowships to come to the United States for a year. (I gather that the program has now been discontinued.) I applied, telling the Council the truth, that I wanted to write a book on nineteenth and twentieth century American poetry and needed the resources of a good library in American literature and history. I was interviewed by Richard Downer, awarded a fellowship, and assigned to the University of Pennsylvania as a Visiting Scholar. Penn was chosen because the dean of American literary scholarship, Robert Spiller, was there. So we set off and spent the year in a splendid house—designed by Stanford White, if rumor is to be credited—in Germantown, Pennsylvania. I had no teaching duties, and I was free—subject to my getting on with the book, *Connoisseurs of Chaos*—to accept any lecture invitations that came along. I lectured in several places that year and made some indelible friendships.

Back in Dublin, I took part in establishing or developing programs in American Studies. I became the first Chairman of the Irish Association of American Studies, and met regularly with my colleagues in the British Association of American Studies (of which Marcus Cunliffe and Harry Allen were the senior members) and the European Association of American Studies. We received a great deal of support and an adequate supply of money from the Cultural Sections of the various American embassies. Those were lively days. We felt that we were doing something fresh, and while we knew that we were still lagging behind

our American colleagues—Henry Nash Smith at Berkeley, to cite a distinguished example—we were not intimidated by that consideration.

Not that our relations with the “Big Shots” were uniformly sweet. I recall a meeting of the European Association of American Studies in Salzburg, at which Gordon Wood was the keynote speaker. He had hardly got into his stride when the English writer Andrew Sinclair made a noisy exit in protest. He thought that Professor Wood was uttering propaganda for the State Department. Generally, though, our proceedings were cordial. Whatever we thought of American foreign policy, we believed that American literature and history were worth talking about. Besides, America was the future, so we knew we had better come to terms with its culture.

Time passed. About twenty years ago I was offered—and I accepted—appointment to the Henry James Chair of English and American Letters at New York University, on the departure of its first occupant, Leon Edel, to Hawaii. I still taught American literature, and wrote about it, but I thought of myself as a generalist, so I arranged to teach English, Irish, and American literature, venturing into each field when I felt inclined and wherever I thought I might be useful. It was all genial, and it still is. My claim to the status of a not-entirely-ignorant tourist in these three fields has not been audibly challenged. But of course, the conditions in our profession at large have changed.

I didn't really take part in the Culture Wars, mainly because I regarded them as an American issue and thus removed from me. In *Ferocious Alphabets* and a few review-essays in *The New York Review of Books*, I grumbled about Deconstruction and aimed a few blows at Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, but I thought the particular occasions of dispute were cosmopolitan rather than American. I have never been a student, undergraduate or graduate, at an American university: my knowledge of the forces at work in American institutions is second-hand and insecure. I felt I could step into a quarrel only when it was a strict question of Theory, independent of local circumstances. But I could not be completely detached. As a matter of policy, I minded my own business, fairly narrowly construed, but I could not help being aware of a certain darkening or thickening of the atmosphere. Two or three years ago I read an essay by my colleague Jim Tuttleton on our part-time associate Derrida—he visits the English Department for a few weeks in the Fall—and I knew I needed to stay out of the war zones.

So, in a fashion, I have survived: no major bones broken, no loss of blood worth mentioning. It is my impression that the Culture Warriors have made inconclusive pacts. Or rather: they have withdrawn to

establish local affiliations, groups of like-minded colleagues united on ideological grounds. Feminists speak to feminists, post-Marxists to post-Marxists, gays and lesbians to gays and lesbians, bourgeois liberals to bourgeois liberals. We are in a milder phase of combat, when members of each constituency dispute among themselves on issues of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, good faith and bad, loyalty and treachery. Each constituency has its own bureaucratic arrangements: journals, conferences, mutual reviewing and back-scratching, occasional eruptions of civil war. Outsiders are not invited to take part in these family quarrels; insiders are preoccupied with their immediate cause, occasionally directing hostile glances at people outside the compound who played a sinister part, they recall, in the big war.

I am so far from these battlegrounds that I now confine myself to a single issue, the question of reading. Arguing about theoretical matters seems to me a waste of time and spirit, unless they have irrefutable bearing on the following question: How do I read a poem or a novel, and if I know the answer to that question, how do I teach students to read? The centrality of literary criticism must be re-asserted, now that so much ostensibly literary activity has drifted off into the soft felicity of politics, sociology, and Cultural Studies. In my new book, *The Practice of Reading*, I suggest that it may be wise to start over and teach the literatures of English as if English were a foreign or second language—which it is for many of our students. In my view, the only questions worth fighting about are these: What should we be reading, given that life is short and libraries are vast? What does reading a novel entail, if it doesn't—and I would argue that it doesn't—entail extracting an ideological moral from the story? What is involved in reading, say, Geoffrey Hill's new poem, "The Triumph of Love" with the seriousness it requires and deserves? What are the uses of literacy? Have we learnt anything from the experiments-in-reading engaged in by I. A. Richards, William Empson, F. R. Leavis, D. W. Harding, Cleanth Brooks, and their associates? Or can we (securely, glibly, stupidly) regard such work as blood-under-the-bridge? What can we teachers in English Departments do that is not done far better by men and women trained in philosophy, religion, politics, sociology, linguistics, psychology, and law?

Still, I wouldn't want to contribute bullets to yet another cultural skirmish. The humanities are already sufficiently depressed: there are not enough tenure-track jobs or, indeed, jobs of any kind in which young PhDs can teach the literature they want to teach, and far too many jobs are confined to Expository Writing programs in which literature is deemed a damned nuisance. The conditions don't make for civil relations. A few years ago Frank Kermode wrote that, since the fall

semester of 1974, there has been “a drastic lowering of the standard of civility.” I don’t recall precisely what happened in fall 1974, either in the United States or in the United Kingdom, where Kermode has done most of his teaching. Perhaps it was the setting up of the School of Criticism and Theory at UC Irvine. Surely Kermode is right. These days, we keep a civil tongue in our heads mainly by staying well away from the notorious boors and cranks. We talk only to our friends.

Tradition Confronts Change: The Place of the Humanities in the University

Lynn Hunt
*Annenberg Professor of History,
University of Pennsylvania*

The humanities are not the whole university and, in many worrisome ways, they are a diminishing part of it. In my remarks, I begin with a distinction between those issues that are problems for every sector within the university and those that are peculiar to the humanities. As a consequence, I will leave aside such fascinating questions as the decline of faculty loyalty to home institutions; the surprising difficulty of recruiting department chairs, and even deans and higher administrative officials; and the effect of financial pressures, market considerations, and corporate business models—except in so far as they have a specific impact on the humanities. I will focus on the consequences of demographic and structural changes for the humanities as a unit. In a nutshell, my argument is as follows: first, the changing demography of the student body has offered the humanities new opportunities that have been missed in some measure; second, as external and even some internal forces have pushed the university to justify its existence on utilitarian grounds, the humanities have come under particular pressure, and they have not responded very well to the challenge; and third, recent efforts to rethink the mission of the humanities should be encouraged, not in a climate of defensiveness, but in an attempt to expand intellectual conversation and inquiry.

Changes in the Student Body

The number of new students is still increasing—with 15 percent growth between 1983 and 1993; the number of BAs is going up—doubling between 1966 and 1993; but the proportion of humanities BAs has steadily dropped from just over 20 percent of all BAs in the late 1960s to a low of about 10 percent in the mid-1980s, increasing only somewhat to 12 percent in the early 1990s.¹ The humanities have not held their own as higher education continues to attract more and more

students. Why is this? The short answer is that more students are now older: between 1980 and 1990, enrollment of students under age 25 increased by 3 percent, whereas enrollment of students 25 and over rose by 34 percent.² We assume that these older students want a practical, skill-oriented education which will offer immediate job benefits. The longer answer is, well, longer, and it is the subject of most of my discussion.

General trends in the student body mask some important differences: women have found the humanities a particularly congenial place, whereas minorities, both male and female, have not. Women have long been attracted to the humanities at the undergraduate level, and this has not really changed: while the overall proportion of BAs awarded to women has risen steadily since the 1960s (from about one-third in 1966 to 55 percent in 1994), the proportion of BAs in the humanities awarded to women has hardly increased at all (55-60 percent depending on type of institution). More striking is the change at the PhD level. Women earned less than 20 percent of humanities PhDs in 1966 as compared to nearly 50 percent of them in 1993. Similarly, the proportion of humanities faculty that are women has increased—to nearly 41 percent in 1992. Only health sciences and education have a higher proportion of women faculty.³

The comparison with minorities is both striking and worrisome. Although the proportion of minority students has increased—in 1993 minority students made up 22.6 percent of college and university students—and even the proportion of minority faculty has increased—in 1992 13.2 percent of the faculty were members of minority groups⁴—the humanities have lagged behind other fields in attracting both minority students and faculty. In the humanities 11 percent of the faculty were minorities in 1987; this increased to only 11.7 percent in 1992. This latter figure put the humanities toward the low end of fields which ranged from 23.2 percent minorities in engineering (largely Asians) to 8.1 percent in agriculture and home economics.⁵

Minority students are less likely than whites to pursue BAs and PhDs in the humanities. It is worth noting that only education and the social sciences produced proportionately more women PhDs than the humanities in 1993 whereas all other fields—including the natural sciences—produced proportionately more minority PhDs in 1993 than the humanities.⁶ Even more important are the prospects for future change. Since the percentage of new PhDs in the humanities who are women is higher than their percentage among the current faculty, there is still considerable room for improvement for women. The same is not true for minorities, for the percentage of new PhDs in the humanities who are minorities (10.9 percent) is no higher and may even be lower than the current percentage of humanities faculty who are minorities (11 percent

in 1987). Here the pool of applicants must change, and that is a very long term challenge. It has been assumed, I think, that minority men and women make these choices out of rational calculation: they will make more money in fields other than the humanities. But I want to suggest that the failure also comes from within the humanities: humanities faculty have faltered when it comes to explaining why their fields matter, especially to students from families in which the parents did not go to college.

Utilitarian Pressures and the Responses of the Humanities

As universities are encouraged to be more directly utilitarian (because of the nature of their student body, as a result of voter pressure, or because of fiscal constraints) and as the model of the business corporation is applied to academia (which encourages sometimes unreflective aping of supposedly scientific measures of “productivity”), the humanities have found themselves under fire. Gone are the days when Disraeli could simply pronounce that “A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning.”⁷ A convergence of factors has created extraordinary pressure on the humanities. At a time when external forces have demanded a more utilitarian rationale and measuring of the worth of the humanities, internally the humanities have been racked by conflicts about the means and ends of humanistic studies. As the almost feverish tension of the culture and theory wars begins to subside, it seems likely that these disputes were not just *political* disagreements about the function of the university in a multicultural society. The most astute commentary sees in these disputes a deeper structural conflict between a model of humanistic study as specialized knowledge (often built on an explicit analogy to the natural sciences) and a model emphasizing more traditional forms of critical appreciation.

In the best of these efforts at broader analysis, Catherine Gallagher persuasively argues that “critics of the nineties, unlike those of the fifties, can point to no underlying consensus about the general benefits that derive from their unique specialization.” She divides the theory and culture wars within English departments into two major and not always complementary strands: the theory strand (largely tied to deconstruction), which explicitly appealed to the model of specialized knowledge; and the cultural studies strand, which insisted that literature and the literary had no special status, and thus implicitly, at least, opposed the model of specialization. These two strands intertwined to create “a widespread inattentiveness to the coordination of institutional and professional demands”—that is, a disjuncture between specialized, professional knowledge and the day-to-day work of teaching.⁸

In other words, I think it likely that the culture and theory wars were a symptom of a deeper problem—an effect of increasing specialization and professionalization—rather than a cause of the decline of the humanities. I do not mean to let off the hook the much-discussed problems of theoretical jargon, the vagueness of cultural studies, political correctness, the knee-jerk hermeneutics of suspicion, and similar issues, and I am not denying their impact. Perhaps I am guilty of applying that powerful solvent that George Santayana defined as inherent in American life: “It seems to neutralize every intellectual element, however tough and alien it may be, and to fuse it in the native good will, complacency, thoughtlessness, and optimism.”⁹ Nevertheless, I do want to set the culture and theory wars in the larger context of structural changes not only in the demography of the student body (and the professoriate) but also in the nature of knowledge and, especially, of teaching at the beginning of the twenty-first century. For I believe that our problems come as much from the flood of non-theory-driven, non-cultural studies, perfectly solid but extremely numerous and specialized studies of traditional subjects as they do from the more outrageous examples generated by the culture and theory wars. Professionalization and specialization in a context of the democratization of higher education have produced a kind of failure of nerve about the meaning of the humanities.

Just What is the Mission of the Humanities?

Most critics of this failure of nerve have fallen back on previous definitions. Tzvetan Todorov, for example: “The goal of a humanist, liberal education is to form minds that are simultaneously tolerant and critical. The method employed to attain this goal is the mastery of a particular tradition.”¹⁰ The problem with this definition is that the growth and fragmentation of knowledge puts into question the definition of “a particular tradition”; the more the humanities try to resemble the natural sciences—the more, that is, that they try to justify their existence by amount of publication and advances over previous scholarship—the more the notion of “tradition” empties itself of meaning. No amount of hand-wringing about theory and culture wars will change this situation, which is deeply rooted in modern Western conceptions of knowledge and convictions about the need for continual innovation.

In other words, we must rethink the humanities in the terms of our time and of our notions of modernity. A useful point of departure can be found in Nannerl O. Keohane’s attempt to define the mission of the research university: “We are performing at least two important functions: providing a sound education for the next generation of citizens, and training skilled

professionals to perform the tasks that must be done if our society is to flourish.”¹¹ As I see it, there has been great confusion about the relation between these two goals. To get ahead, which means to be perceived as “cutting edge,” many humanities scholars have tended to over-emphasize specialized skills. They have responded to the rise of utilitarian pressures by arguing that they are skilled professionals with distinctive knowledge just like engineers or economists. But this specialized learning is really useful only to undergraduates intending to pursue graduate study in the discipline. Concomitantly, it might be argued that scholars in cultural studies have emphasized lessons in citizenry at the expense of specialized knowledge: that is, they seem to assume that all undergraduates should learn an ironic stance toward traditional Western values while denying the virtues of any kind of specialization.

What I am suggesting is that we need to rethink the mix—and, by the way, I would argue that this problem is even more critical in the social sciences than in the humanities because their pretensions to scientific status are even greater. Humanities students need to learn how to think in a rigorous way about what makes life worth living (which means some considerable attention to tradition), *and* they need to learn how to cope with the explosion of knowledge. They need to learn, therefore, the enduring qualities of tradition, the rigor of a disciplinary specialty, and the skill to navigate between both. Please note that I am not suggesting that we revive the old dichotomies between undergraduate and graduate education, between general education and specialized knowledge, or between training for citizenship and professionalized skills for the market. On the contrary, I am suggesting that undergraduates need to learn the techniques of specialized research in a variety of fields, and that graduate students need to learn how to teach appreciation for the critical tradition as well as the skills of critical thinking, reading, and writing.

Although it may not be obvious from what might seem at first glance to be a series of platitudes about the virtues of humanities education, a serious reconsideration of these issues would encourage a major realignment in our current practices of hiring, tenure, and promotion as well as major changes in the ways we teach both undergraduate and graduate students.

But the obstacles to change are great. Humanities faculty are among the oldest in the university: only 15.8 percent of humanities professors were under 40 in 1992, as compared to 21 percent in the social sciences and 20.7 percent overall. Similarly, more humanities educators are over 60: 29.3 percent in 1992, as opposed to 25.7 percent in the social sciences and 25.7 percent for all fields.¹² The forces of resistance to change should not be underestimated: the application of utilitarian measures of productivity,

severe salary compression in the assistant and associate ranks, and the threat of downsizing to adjunct and part-time positions all make the status quo more attractive than change. The shift in social patterns within the university encourages self-regarding, disciplinary-centered ambition and discourages collective consideration of the institutional good. Now that both partners in a couple work, there is less social life within the university. Junior colleagues are encouraged to think that all that matters is getting ahead—and that means devoting one’s time to publication and not much else. Studies have shown that younger faculty tend to be deeply suspicious of the motives of administrators and senior colleagues. In short, structural changes within the university work against a collective pursuit of change for the better; in fact, they actually foster inertia.

Rather than end on a down note, however, I want to insist that change is nonetheless germinating everywhere. We may well be saved by a combination of undergraduates’ craving for some experience of “the tradition,” graduate students’ anxieties about their futures, and returning students’ enthusiasm for old and new subjects alike. UCLA, for example, has more students in its upper-level course on Livy in Latin than ever before. Professors at community colleges and state universities report that their students—of all ethnicities—hunger for great literature in the Western tradition, and in all traditions. These students want the training the elites of yesteryear received as a matter of course. Graduate students’ worries about getting a job have put pressure on departments to teach more about teaching, and in the process to think in new ways about what teaching is supposed to accomplish in the first place. Even utilitarian demands have had an up side: universities now recognize that they *should* teach every student how to undertake a research problem and that they *can* provide continuing education to adults and seniors—who, it turns out, are very eager to acquire the education they missed in the first place or did not know they needed for their current job.

Although I am sure that I am guilty of Santayana’s charge of optimism and excessive intellectual neutralization, I hope that in my case it has not been accompanied, as he feared, with complacency or thoughtlessness. But I leave that for you to judge.

Notes

¹ On enrollments see *1995 Digest of Education Statistics*, <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsold/D95/dintro3.html>>; on proportion of BA degrees awarded in the humanities see Alvin Kernan, ed., *What’s Happened to the Humanities?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Figure 1, p. 248.

² *1995 Digest of Education Statistics* (as above).

³ For most figures about women in higher education, see Kernan, *What's Happened*, Figures 11-14; on proportion of faculty who are women, see *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1997, p. 26.

⁴ *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1995, pp. 14 and 22.

⁵ For 1987, *Digest of Education Statistics 1994*, p. 232; for 1992, *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1997, p. 26.

⁶ *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1995, p. 18.

⁷ In a speech to the House of Commons, March 11, 1873, John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (Boston, 1968), p. 613.

⁸ Catherine Gallagher, "The History of Literary Criticism," *Daedalus* 126 (1997), pp. 133-153, quotes p. 151.

⁹ From *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1920), quoted in Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, p. 867.

¹⁰ As quoted approvingly in Eugene Goodheart, "Reflections on the Culture Wars," *Daedalus* 126 (1997): 153-175, quote, p. 159.

¹¹ Nannerl O. Keohane, "The Mission of the Research University," *Daedalus* 122 (1993): 101-125; quote, p. 117.

¹² Based on figures given in *1995 Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 224, <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsold/D95/dtab224.html>>.

Humanism, Bio-cultural Diversity, and Our Unfinished National Project

Lucius Outlaw
*T. Wistar Brown Professor,
Haverford College*

There are immense challenges for me in trying to settle on an appropriate definition of a “humanist,” in struggling to *be* a “humanist,” on terms that maintain continuity, in some appropriate sense, with previous traditions of humanism that have changed in quite important ways—traditions that many of us, I dare say, have felt ourselves compelled to question and to change as part of efforts to refashion our humanistic disciplines, learned societies, and campus communities. Of course, these challenges of working out a viable and acceptable understanding of a “humanist” can readily be cast as yet another case of an old, recurrent, and formidable venture in thinking: the “philosophical” task, if you will, of determining how to conceive of and understand something as both “the same” in important respects—those that establish the essential identity of the object of thought—and as “changed” in no less important respects, but not in ways that alter its essential identity. Personal aspects aside, then, the challenges posed for our consideration by our topic are not extraordinary. Rather, they are of a kind that define the efforts of teachers, researchers, scholars, and administrators who do the work of the humanities, endeavors that are defined to their very core by the continuous need to contend with historicity, both human and natural, and with the all so necessary work of maintaining life-preserving continuity through inevitable processes of inertia, progress, slippage, setbacks, and decline. On the occasion of this symposium, however, there is the promise of joining others on the panel and in the audience in the rewarding intellectual and social adventure of wrestling with the always vexing issues of “continuity and change” with regard to what it means to be a humanist, on campus and elsewhere. I am honored, indeed, by John D’Arms’ vote of confidence in asking me to be a panelist. My sincere thanks to John for inviting me to participate.

But not just for the pleasure of intellectual company. At issue are identities—thus the ordering of lives, agendas, and the practices of persons—and the cultures of institutional communities devoted to learning and to the mediation of learnedness in service to structuring the identities and *character* of successive generations of young people. In my own case the matter is especially challenging: how can I—to the extent that I take myself to be, in significant part, a person of *African* descent (the challenges to be met in partially identifying myself in this way require their own ongoing consideration)—knowingly and willfully identify myself with traditions of the humanities that, in important ways and instances, have provided significant intellectual and practical resources for what Paul Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic*,¹ characterizes as the rational and rationalized “excessive barbarity” of European peoples in their dealings with peoples from Africa, and elsewhere? This particular challenge is all the more compelling when, guided by this question, I attend to the traditions of intellectual endeavor organized for study and engagement as Western philosophy, and of the Enlightenments especially, since the latter helped to define and administer the holocaust inflicted on African peoples by peoples from Europe. Yet, truth be told, the modern European and American Enlightenments continue to be mined for very valuable resources to assist the ongoing efforts of African and African-descended peoples (and of European and European-descended peoples, as well) to recognize and secure the full humanity of us all.

What, then, to continue, what to change, in the collections of traditions and endeavors we call the “humanities” in light of this historic “dialectic of Enlightenment”: that is, the linked, conflicting, even contradictory commitments and practices constitutive of humanism, liberalism, racism, invidious ethnocentrism, sexism, class exploitation, and imperialism that defined the projects of modernity in the West?

I do not wish to throw out hand-grenade questions and run for cover by declaring that I do not have enough time to work through these questions toward even a provisional resolution. However, it is the case that I have time only to pose questions that I find compelling, the resolution of which requires more time, attention, and vigorous, disciplined, civil discussion than can be summoned on this occasion. Still, in begging off a bit, I promise to remain committed to working with others, whenever opportune, on these and other matters raised in the context of the theme for the symposium; and, in doing so, to insure, as best I can, that difficult, compelling questions not become explosives that destroy prospects for mutually beneficial collaboration. Rather, I urge that we regard these questions as challenges we must work together to resolve, in concert with persons in our local communities,

organizations, and institutions as well as in our academic gatherings, so as to advance the American experiment in the very human venture of getting on with living in ways that maximize the possibilities for realizing human flourishing.

It is the commitment to human flourishing that, for me, defines what it means to be a “humanist.” What, then, is required if one is to be a humanist today and tomorrow? I remain convinced—though I am open to being persuaded otherwise—that the terms and values of humanism can *no longer* be taken, simply and exclusively, from what for centuries have been institutionalized and honored as its informing traditions: in particular, those complex intellectual and practical legacies of Western Europeans I have alluded to that are narrated as the Renaissance, Enlightenments, and modern Judeo-Christian traditions. These truly revolutionary developments were also part of the intellectual, moral, and pragmatic infrastructures of rapacious capitalist imperialism accompanied and informed by racism and invidious ethnocentrism. Together these ventures have comprised a complex project of projects that Samir Amin, among others, characterizes as “Eurocentrism”: a theory of world history, developed during the Renaissance (which he regards as a decisive “qualitative break” in the history of humanity), that becomes a global political project when “Europeans become conscious of the idea that the conquest of the world by their civilization is henceforth a possible objective. They therefore develop a sense of absolute superiority, even if the actual submission of other peoples to Europe has not yet taken place.”² This project to conquer the world and peoples was driven, according to Amin, by several motivations and aspirations: a commitment to the rational ordering of virtually all human life and conduct; and a commitment to universalism—that is, to extending this ordering both geographically and temporally so as, eventually, to encompass the entire globe. An ideology of white racial superiority was deployed to assist the legitimation of this venture in globalizing capitalist expansion and imperialism: to legitimate, especially, the inequalities that continue to constitute it. Other elements of this ideology included construals of Christianity as a decidedly *European* religion; what Amin terms the “myth” that Europeans are the direct descendants, culturally and biologically, of Greek ancestors; and the construing of virtually all non-European peoples as less than fully human, if human at all.

It is because modern humanism in the West developed in and came to define, in large part, this historical matrix of Eurocentrism that I am compelled to worry about the legacies of meanings, convictions, and practices that might be informing notions of what it means to be a

“humanist” today; and why I claim that those legacies alone are inadequate for forging a notion of a humanist that will be both appropriate and adequate to the challenges we face today. However, while declaring the legacies of Western humanism inadequate, I do not wish either to claim or to suggest that this important collection of commitments (i.e., humanism) is without redemptive value because its meanings and possibilities were completely synonymous with and exhausted by the invidious aspirations and inhumane results of Eurocentrism. Rather, my concern is that we recommit ourselves to the work of identifying and taking up those redemptive values as part of a critical and honest engagement with the informing legacies of the conflicted, distorted humanism that was part and parcel of Eurocentrism while continuing to affirm and refine, if need be, those values that have helped to make possible human flourishing to whatever degree.

In the course of that engagement, we might, however, be tempted to conclude that the humanisms of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment of Western modernity were hijacked by the mutually supportive European projects of globalizing capitalism and the quest to impose white racial supremacy. But that, I think, would be too easy. A harder question to explore, but one that I think we are obliged to explore, is whether the humanisms were *integrally* related to these projects—whether in fact the philosophical anthropologies of humanism were the defining core of the color-coded racial and gender hierarchies by which European peoples, certain classes of men in particular, sought to order the larger world of peoples and individuals as well as their own decidedly “modern” nation-states. If we conclude that Eurocentrism was integral to Western humanism—and I am convinced that it was—then those of us who take ourselves seriously as “humanists” must be very, very wary after having been educated by way of and into the canonical traditions of institutions that for centuries were organized and maintained to be sites for the construction, validation, legitimation, and mediation of authoritative traditions of Truthfulness, Beauty, and Excellence all taken as exemplified, virtually exclusively, in the best efforts of “white folks.” Many of us are still engaged in struggles to renovate “the humanities,” to rehabilitate the very idea and ideal of “humanism” through critical reconstructions of some histories, recoveries of various excluded histories (in particular of women among virtually all peoples), and reconstructions of curricula as part of a revised national agenda.

This important, ongoing work has produced historic results, particularly many of the efforts that today tend to be gathered under the flag of “multiculturalism,” though it would be more appropriate, I think, to regard such efforts as continuations of centuries-old struggles to be free of the

regard such efforts as continuations of centuries-old struggles to be free of the inhumane aspects of Western modernity and its perverted humanism. One measure of the significance of these more recent efforts, understood as aspirations to secure the respectful recognition of the multiplicity of cultures and of peoples constituting this world, is that even Nathan Glazer, a much respected scholar and influential advisor to policy-makers, has been compelled to concede that “we are all multiculturalists now”: “. . . I mean that we all now accept a greater degree of attention to minorities and women and their role in American history and social studies and literature classes in schools. Those few who want to return American education to a period in which the various subcultures were ignored, and in which America was projected as the peak and end-product of civilization, cannot expect to make any progress in the schools.”³

Even if we assume for the sake of discussion that Glazer is right, what are the implications for how we are to take stock of the now canonical modern humanist intellectual and social projects as ventures in establishing *the* norms for Truth, Beauty, and Right Living—ventures that have been institutionalized in the various disciplines of higher education in continental Europe, Great Britain, and throughout the Americas? A sober regard for anthropological and cultural diversity, human historicity, and for the structured dynamics and transformations—as well as the unpredictable happenings—of natural and social orders, microscopic and macroscopic, will defy efforts, I believe, my own included, to validate any articulations of absolute and universal truths in any field of endeavor, including formal systems such as mathematics. (In driving home to Haverford, Pennsylvania from Boston on the afternoon before the symposium, I listened to an interview on National Public Radio of a cosmologist participating in a meeting at Fermi Labs in Batavia, Illinois, where scholars had gathered to consider the results obtained by two teams working independently indicating that the universe is expanding at an *increasing* rate, rather than slowing down as had been predicted by some theorists. If “true”—that is, if confirmed by the best methods available *at present*—this finding overturns some of the most settled and important “opinions” [no longer “true knowledge”] regarding the very origins, nature, and future of the cosmos. It seems that Einstein’s already troublesome “cosmological constant” may now have to be discarded altogether and other important aspects of his theories revised . . .) The collections of legacies and endeavors we call “the humanities” are not, and cannot be, the repository of permanently settled absolute and universal truths about anything, though they should provide important resources for the *on-going work of fashion-*

ing always contingent, provisional norms by which to order human lives, institutions, and communities in favor of providing the best possible conditions for living well under prevailing conditions.

Such recognition, however, does not settle the vexing questions, always to be confronted and settled provisionally—always to be revisited, by succeeding generations certainly—regarding what forms of life are most appropriate for satisfying criteria for the *good* life? How, then, to decide which among the many cultural projects of the world's peoples best exemplify the norms to which we should commit ourselves in order to be both guardians and practitioners of forms of "humanism" more in service to human well-being than the forms of the past?

This will not be accomplished, I am convinced, by ardent intellectual endeavors devoted to discovering *a priori*, universal "laws" of Right Living, whether in Reason, the Natural Order of Things, histories of Western Enlightenments, or in the Revealed Word of some Supreme Being whose existence, thereby the veracity "His" Word for us, we claim to know with certainty. Still, how? I propose by accepting, for starters, a view of human existence as always contingent and structured by varying rates of continuous change, crucial aspects of which are the vagaries of belief-commitments and behaviors of evolving humans as well as of chance. And, as a consequence of this acceptance, daring to take up the awesome and exhilarating responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities to fashion, in some cases—to revise or recover in others—structured, institutionalized practices for the democratic production, validation, justification, legitimation, mediation, and social distribution of knowledges devoted to continually posing and answering the question "How best to live and flourish?" Put differently, we humanists, I contend, must be committed, sometimes radical, liberal-democratic conservators and courageous relativists without being either irresponsible nihilists or anarchic individualists.

In being such we must—at least I must—struggle to bring about a consensus regarding answers to the question "Is it possible, and if so on what terms and through what practices, to be both an appropriately principled 'humanist' who affirms individuality, and an equally principled and convinced pluralist with regard to human bio-cultural diversities and their legacies—that is, one who accepts and affirms the social-natural diversity of human bio-cultural social groupings as essential to the well-being of the species while doing so on terms consistent with recognition of essential human similarity—and to do so on terms and in ways that do not violate appropriate norms for moral and intellectual coherence and consistency?" Along these lines, is

“multiculturalism” now an appropriate term for a concept and a set of convictions and practices partially constituting a historically distinctive form of humanism suitable for our times, thus for our colleges and universities—a set of convictions that includes increasingly better informed, explicit rejections of the hierarchic racism, invidious ethnocentrism, class exploitation, and sexism of Eurocentrism, among other sins, that have shaped the very traditions and institutions informing our legacies?

I believe that the answer to each of the questions should be “yes.” But I am equally firm in my belief that the work of forging a consensus out of our diverse cultural life-worlds and their legacies on behalf of a set of unifying convictions and agendas for personal, professional, and social life to be shared by enough of us to secure the viability of the American Experiment, as well as of our institutions, disciplines, and learned organizations, as ventures devoted to the realization of human flourishing, is the most difficult yet important challenge facing us today. It is also most exhilarating: because the stakes are so high, success, to whatever degree, is so very rewarding.

What to continue, what to change, *what to fashion anew* in constituting and mediating “humanist” legacies for succeeding generations? Those are, indeed, the orienting questions for all who would be humanists. An orienting answer is quite easy to articulate: whatever promotes human flourishing. And what shall we settle on as constituting “flourishing”? Well, there’s the rub, is it not? Settling on viable answers to *this* question, answers that are in keeping with the ideal of flourishing itself, requires, I offer, ongoing democratic discussions in search of a consensus that will underwrite a shared civic culture sufficient for a stable, just, liberal, and democratic nation-state made up of persons and peoples of diverse life-orienting convictions.⁴ Among the challenges to be taken up by us humanist teachers, researchers, scholars, and administrators is that of working out—likewise in democratic yet rigorously critical, sensitive, and knowledgeable ways, drawing on our cultural experiences as well as on the forms and legacies of the arts, our disciplines, and learned organizations—the terms, conditions, and practices of human flourishing that are most appropriate for our time and our places in the world.

Notes

¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1993.

² Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), pp. 72-73.

³ Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 13-14.

⁴ For a very insightful and commendable effort at setting out the need for and possible approaches to such a consensus, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

Coming Home: Institutional Loyalty in an Expanding Academic Universe

Judith Shapiro
President,
Barbard College

Back in the 1950s, sociologist Alvin Gouldner carried out what was to become a classic study of the faculty of a liberal arts college. Gouldner was doing research on role theory, more specifically, on the distinction developed by Robert Merton between “manifest” and “latent” roles. In applying this distinction to the academic setting, Gouldner was seeking to understand how, beneath the surface of the college’s system of manifest roles (those designated by the usual faculty and administrative titles, such as Assistant Professor of Biology, Professor of Latin, Dean of Students), there existed a significant pattern of “latent” roles that were central to the real life of the institution.¹

The particular latent roles that Gouldner chose to analyze were those of “cosmopolitan” and “local.” Cosmopolitans were those members of the academic community whose orientation was toward their profession. They were the faculty committed above all to achieving distinction in their respective fields, whose primary reference group was composed of colleagues in their disciplines. They were the ones who would jump at an offer from a more prestigious university, even if it were to involve a reduction in salary. “Locals,” on the other hand, were focused on the institution, where their primary loyalty lay. They tended to be less productive as scholars and more involved in the affairs of the college community.

Over time, the trend has clearly been for faculty at most institutions—and certainly at academically selective liberal arts colleges—to become more cosmopolitan and less local. The reward structure in academia has clearly supported this development, giving priority to publication and recognition within one’s profession. Teaching, which has been under-rewarded by comparison, has remained more difficult to assess satisfactorily, and has only recently begun to benefit from the kind of collegial interaction and peer review that has long characterized

scholarly activity. Service to the institution is a bit like housework—necessary, but relatively unappreciated, often viewed even by those who perform it as a distraction or an escape from more important work.

Another major delocalizing influence on academia is, of course, information technology, which, as is often pointed out, can bring one closer to colleagues across the world than to those down the hall. Developments in this area will continue to affect our working lives in ways that are difficult to predict.

A cosmopolitan faculty brings with it many advantages: excellence in scholarship; teaching informed by an ongoing engagement in one's field; a high profile for one's institution; and a good network into the wider world of the academy and the professions. Faculty with a "local" orientation, as Gouldner showed in his study, often suffer from intellectual stagnation and parochialism. Something important is lost, however, when the balance swings too far away from institutional loyalty. College and universities are, after all, communities and need to be able to function as such. In these times, especially, when the world of higher education is being challenged by rapid and unpredictable change and is under the gun from a government and a general public experiencing high anxiety about cost and access, it is all the more important that the best creative energies of the faculty be mobilized in the institutional interest. Colleges and universities must be able to command—and to deserve—the engagement of their faculty on the home front.

In considering how an institution can retain the advantages of a cosmopolitan faculty, while making their focus more local, it is important to remember that these categories are analytical distinctions, ideal types. Any individual faculty member can combine the characteristics of both roles to varying degrees. It has been my own experience—my own good fortune, in fact—to have spent my academic life at a series of institutions where faculty have been at once distinguished cosmopolitans and dedicated locals. This has been a major factor in the strength of institutions like Brandeis University, where I was an undergraduate; the University of Chicago, where I began my teaching career; and Bryn Mawr and Barnard Colleges, where I have spent the past twenty-three years as a faculty member and administrator. Selective liberal arts colleges like Barnard and Bryn Mawr are, in fact, particularly likely places to find a felicitous combination of cosmopolitan and local. Their faculties are composed of teacher-scholars who really do succeed in bringing together serious scholarship and dedicated teaching, while also devoting themselves to the governance of their institutions.²

Let us now consider where administrators fit in this scheme of things. They, too, were included in Gouldner's study, and at that time, generally fell into the category of locals. Since then, administrators have been subject to cosmopolitanizing trends of their own. Their responsibilities have become more complex and have taken them further from direct contact with academic programs. They have their own professional associations, which bring them together with their administrative peers and exercise a centrifugal force not unlike the disciplinary pull of scholarly associations on the faculty. Moving in different worlds, connecting to different reference groups, faculty and administrators have become members of separate sub-cultures.

Institutions of higher education must find a way to counteract these centrifugal forces, and decrease the distance between faculty members and administrators. Collegial and effective working relationships between faculty and administration are key to the kind of constructive change that needs to take place in our nation's colleges and universities. What strategies are likely to be helpful in sustaining such relationships?

To begin, we should recognize the two basic ways in which faculty members and administrators differ: First, given their disparate responsibilities, they do not routinely spend their time considering the same types of issues. Second, they are not called upon to make decisions in the same way and with the same frequency. The first difference lies within the domain of what we might call the sociology of knowledge: how information is distributed in a society according to the social positions of its members. In the course of pursuing their respective activities and fulfilling their respective obligations, administrators and faculty members come to involve themselves with different things. If, however, faculty are to play an informed and productive role in the affairs of the institution, administrators and faculty must share more knowledge.

In this context, it is important to remember that teaching is the responsibility not only of the faculty, but of all of an academic community, administrators included. Administrators must provide information to the faculty in a useful, economical, and compelling way. Since the goal is not to turn faculty members into administrators, the time faculty members spend in governance must be used with maximum efficiency. Data must be presented clearly and in ways that facilitate analysis. Information-sharing must be driven by institutional priorities and geared to decision-making.

This brings us to the second major difference between faculty members and administrators: the frequency with which decisions must

be made and the empirical basis required for reaching closure on an issue. Faculty can defer reaching a conclusion—are, in fact, socialized to do so—until all possible relevant evidence has been gathered. They know that it is always possible to push the research further, deepen the analysis, make the description fuller, enrich and add nuance to the interpretation. Indeed, this provides the forward momentum of the various scientific and scholarly disciplines. Administrators, on the other hand, must make decisions constantly, often with imperfect data. They attempt to gather as much sound information as possible on a matter under consideration; they do their best to subject that information to alternative modes of analysis, and to think creatively about a range of possible solutions. But their institutional responsibilities demand that they address an issue expeditiously and move on to the next one. Faculty members need to understand this, and adapt to it as they work in partnership with administrators.

In the course of the work they do together, faculty members and administrators are both best served, at times, by forgetting the differences between them and operating as a group of colleagues trying to solve a problem together. At other times, the division of labor in governance comes to the fore, and there must be clarity on the ultimate responsibility that administrators bear for making certain decisions. Every attempt should be made to reach decisions by consensus, though this is not always possible. When consensus is not reached, administrators are accountable to their faculty colleagues in the literal sense of having to present an account, an explanation of why they have felt it necessary to pursue a course at variance with what faculty have recommended. This account must be responsive to the points that faculty members have put forward and to concerns that they have raised. While administrators will not always compel agreement, they should make every effort to be understood. Faculty, for their part, should find it fair that authority and accountability go hand in hand.

As faculty members and administrators come together in their differing roles and seek to bridge the gaps that lie between them, they share not only responsibility but also credit for the fortunes of their institutions. Just as institutions need what a loyal faculty can offer them, so do faculty themselves reap rewards from participation in the life and vitality of a local academic community. Even those faculty members who are the hottest commodities in the academic marketplace, who can write their own tickets and make their fortunes anywhere, can—and do—derive a satisfaction from being institution builders that runs deeper than the satisfactions of their individual careers.

The sense of contributing to something beyond oneself, what the committed teacher derives from interaction with students and the dedicated scholar from an enduring contribution to a field of study, awaits both faculty members and administrators who come together to make a real difference in the life of a college or university. We hold these institutions—each with its own distinctive history, identity, mission, and set of possibilities—in trust for those who will come after us. Let us give ourselves the pleasure and the privilege of feeling that they have become better places because we were a part of them.

Notes

¹ Alvin G. Gouldner, “Cosmopolitans and Locals: Toward An Analysis of Latent Social Roles,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 2, 1957. Some of the following discussion of Gouldner’s work was included in Judith Shapiro, “What Will It Take to Attract and Retain Outstanding Faculty?” *DePauw Conference on Leadership in the Twenty-first Century, Report of the Proceedings*, 1989.

² In an often-cited study, Robert McCaughey, Professor of History and former Dean of the Faculty at Barnard College, provides evidence for a correlation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness at a group of selective liberal arts colleges (*Scholars and Teachers*, New York: Conceptual Litho Reproductions, Inc., 1994).

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