



Reason, Individualism, Freedom Institute

Issue 12

September 2006

Contents

[Versatility and Education](#)

[New Advisor William B. Allen, Ph.D.](#)

[Update on Website Design](#)

[Dissidents At Dartmouth](#)

[As Goes Harvard](#)

[Versatility and Education \(continued from left\)](#)

["What I cannot create, I do not understand."](#)

[Versatility and Education](#)



Last month, we talked about some of the conditions of excellent learning and the features of highly successful, creative and adaptable individuals whom *The World Is Flat*

Today on the fifth anniversary of September 11th, let us dedicate ourselves to increasing reason, individualism and freedom in the world - the best hope for peace and prosperity - through education.

Professor William B. Allen, our latest Advisory Board addition, is featured this month, and Marsha Familaro Enright examines 'versatilists,' the nature of creativity and education at the College.

• **New Advisor William B. Allen, Ph.D.**

This month we are very happy to welcome a new member to our Advisory Board: Professor William B. Allen a professor of Political Philosophy at Michigan State University currently on leave to Princeton for the James Madison Program on American Ideals and Institutions. Dr. Allen is an expert on liberal arts education, its history, importance and problems.

He is also Chairman and co-founder of Toward A Fair Michigan, whose mission is to further understanding of the equal opportunity issues involved in guaranteeing civil rights for all citizens, to preserve Michigan's tradition of progressively affirming equal rights for all, and to provide a civic forum for a fair and open exchange of views on the question of affirmative action. He served previously on the National Council for the Humanities and as Chairman and Member of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

He has published extensively. His pending study,

author Thomas Friedman calls the 'Versatilists.' We also discussed the limited attentional resources of the conscious mind. In the following, we will talk about how the new College's curriculum and methods will nurture the development of Versatilist characteristics.

The Versatilist

The highly adaptable Versatilist can move from a job requiring one skill-set to another, like Marcia Loughry whom Friedman interviewed. As her former functions became outsourced or obsolete, she moved from an EDS word processing job in 1978 to 4 other jobs, taught herself Novell Netware and acquired other skills and knowledge, eventually rising to one of the highest positions at EDS - Enterprise Architect - all through curiosity, learning, and a willingness to adapt. "The deep technical skills around math and science are going to get you in the door, but they are not what are going to keep you there or make you wildly successful. What will keep you there is developing a broader view," she says.

Integration

Developing a broad view is directly related to the work of integration. Before valuable information and ideas can be stored in the mind's subconscious, they have to pass through the conscious mind, which usually can handle only about 7 discreet items at any one time (see George A. Miller's 1956 psychological classic "[The Magic Number Seven, Plus Or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information](#)") If you've ever wondered why you need a list to remember what you have to do, here's the reason, and it's one of the reasons for our limited attentional resources.

Re-Thinking Uncle Tom: The Political Philosophy of H. B. Stowe, should appear in the coming year. He recently published *Habits of Mind: Fostering Access and Excellence in Higher Education* (with Carol M. Allen).

He has two grown children, one a professor of Classics at the University of Chicago and another a practicing attorney in Washington, D.C., and is married to Carol M. Allen, a Research Specialist at Michigan State University.

We hope to utilize his expertise well.

• Update on Website Design

RIFI Vice President for Research Don Baldino is sending out a professional Request For Proposal to several website designers. We hope to have news of a new vendor next month.

• Dissidents At Dartmouth

Recent attempts by alumni to have more influence over the college resulted in the election of outspoken alumni T.J. Rodgers, Cypress Semiconductor CEO, Peter Robinson, a former Reagan speechwriter and current Hoover Institute fellow, and Todd Zywicki, a law professor. Elected unexpectedly by a wide margin, all three had run on platforms promoting academic standards and free speech, and concerned about Dartmouth's leadership crisis. A September 1st editorial in the Wall Street Journal recounts the governance controversy.

Did the reigning Alumni Council welcome such involvement? Hardly. Their response? Change the Alumni Council constitution to require potential candidates to submit petitions to the nominating committee before candidates are selected, to prevent outsiders from encroaching on their power.

"And so a pattern emerges at Dartmouth, one interminably replicated on other campuses: The academic establishment wants to consolidate its

Ideas – abstractions – are the primordial human invention which circumvent this limitation, because ideas incorporate myriad data into a single audio-visual concrete, a word or symbol. All instances of babies are integrated into the idea of 'baby,' and you can apply what you know about babies to any one you come across. Voila! You've saved a lot of time and energy.

Integration of simple ideas, like colors or types of animals and objects, into more abstract groupings like 'mammal' ultimately make the human mind extremely powerful. Imagination and integration work together to produce the torrent which is human creativity. Integration of information into ideas, and actions into skills, is the psychologically economical way to utilize our limited conscious resources when thinking and solving problems. Integration of knowledge across broad ranges of subjects is a characteristic of creativity – and versatility.

Creativity

Research consistently finds that the highly creative tend to have very broad, as well as deep, interests and knowledge. Creative people apply unconventional information and ideas to problems, integrating information in unusual ways, across conventional subject areas. Famed physicist [Richard Feynman](#) is a case in point. Think of his brilliant demonstration of the space shuttle Challenger's O-Ring temperature problem which integrated an esoteric, bedeviling engineering problem with the mundane: by dropping an O-ring in a glass of ice water, he simply and directly proved that it could not stand up to low temperatures.

He was also famous for his wide-

authority and exclude those who might deviate from the party line," the editorial concludes.

Score another one in the insidious war against significantly different ideas.

[Read the Wall Street Journal editorial](#)

• As Goes Harvard

For an informative - and disturbing - discussion of today's educational issues and problems, including an insightful history, see Yale historian and classicist Donald Kagan's article "[As Goes Harvard](#)" Kagan addresses so many of the crucial contemporary problems with college, including lack of a core curriculum insuring fundamental thinking and writing skills, meaningful assessments of teaching effectiveness, and character issues. Thanks to Professor [Stephen Hicks](#) for finding this article.

• Versatility and Education (continued from left)

philosophy to economics, mathematics to literature, history to science. Properly schooled to think deeply about these works, a student economically recognizes patterns, trends and influences of these ideas everywhere in culture, from art to business, from job trends to medical ones.

Let me give you one small example: Did you know that there was a time when people were confused about how something could be one thing now and another thing in the future? They could not figure out how that worked. I'm sure you all take for granted the idea that something can actually be one thing and potentially another – like a baby is potentially an adult human. However, it took Aristotle's genius to resolve this problem with the identification of the concepts of 'actual' and 'potential.' Try to imagine our world without these ideas – how could we think about so much, especially in science and technology.

Our students will learn this, along with the important fact that so much we take for granted

ranging interests which included samba bands and experiments on ants. He put no limits on his curiosity about the world. Contrary to traditional thought but consistent with research findings, Feynman's measured IQ was in the high range – 124 – but not the highest possible, IQ 'genius' (135+). Measured IQ's of geniuses are 116 or higher, apparently making a highish IQ a condition – but not a sufficient one – for high creativity.

Other conditions seem to be equally important, enabling education to make a significant difference. For example, the tendency to amass information from close, first-hand observation is very important, as exemplified by [Michael Faraday](#), pictured above. Faraday had no formal education and knew only arithmetic, but discovered the laws of electro-magnetism through fascinated observation of and experiments on nature.

A mind that is curious and constantly problem solving is another characteristic of the creative. Take the inventor of VELCRO, [George Mestral](#). He and his dog became covered with burrs during a walk. Examining how the burrs use microscopic hooks to stick to the loops of his pant fabric, he realized that he could make a new type of fastener. A little nature hike turned into a billion dollar industry.

How does this stick to education?

We cannot change what nature gives our students, however, we *can* develop a program that not only informs students, but insures they develop an ability to think broadly and in an integrated fashion, and which encourages their curiosity and careful observation of the world. An excellent Liberal Arts curriculum, infused with deep

in our great civilization was invented by creative individuals down the ages. Further, reflecting on concepts which we take for granted will raise the analytic thinking skills of students. This is just one benefit of studying the Great Books.

Knowledge Across Categories

Also, through the use of the Great Books and important questions and assignments posed by our teachers, our classes will purposefully integrate knowledge from one domain to another and encourage students to find connections between seemingly disparate material, like Feynman or Mestral. Teachers will urge students to constantly seek connections among these great ideas and between the ideas and our contemporary world, also nurturing students' observational powers. Unfortunately, most college curriculums and faculties make no attempt to do these crucial tasks.

Discussing the place a fact, idea or theory has in human life will be a constant aim. Teachers will consistently require – and offer – proof for statements and beliefs, and explicit logical arguments. Everyone will 'check their premises.' The facts and truth, however unpleasant, will be the standard. *How* to deal with unpleasant facts without denying them will be a skill highly encouraged. Teachers who model such thinking teach volumes. Our special teacher training will ensure these aims.

Practical Skills

The special seminar methods we will use, an elaboration of [Shared Inquiry](#) methods, require students to learn to deeply understand others' points of view and communicate their own clearly – so important for successful team work in any profession, as well as life in general. Required collaborative research work and business internships explicitly tied to the curriculum will further develop team skills, and every student will take on serious responsibilities for running the College, requiring team work and exposing students to real problems of governance. Students will experience a breadth of experience as well as thinking so important to the creative Versatilist.

Lastly, the close, in-person interaction of students and faculty as well as outside experts and special

questions about meaning and purpose, and connection of knowledge to living, provides a broad base of knowledge.

Using the [Great Books](#), our curriculum will school students in timeless ideas, useful in any era or place and demonstrative of the highest creative thinking skills as well as the most influential ideas in civilization, from (continued in right column)

guests in and out of class facilitates development of these skills and nurtures the kind of deep, thoughtful examination of ideas, thinking, purposes and assumptions so radically life-changing and empowering. By embodying great thinking, respect for independent judgment and deep appreciation of individual freedom, the faculty will also model the very values on which the College is founded.

Next month, we will talk about the importance of faculty and inspiration to our educational methods.

To be continued.

Quick Links...

- [Our Website](#)
- [Mission](#)
- [Executive Summary](#)
- [More About Us](#)

Marsha Familiaro Enright

marsha.enright@collegeunitedstates.org

<http://www.collegeunitedstates.org>

9400 S. Damen Avenue Chicago, IL
60620 Phone: 773-677-6418

- "What I cannot create, I do not understand."

Richard Feynman

