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An Imagined First Year in College

I want to make a suggestion that university faculty could adopt.

Simply divide the four years that comprise college into two and two. Make the first two the teaching of the 16 processes and the last two the study of the subjects that the faculty so dearly love. Introduction to X, which no dominates the first two years of college for most students, would be abandoned. The faculty hate teaching it anyway and the students hate taking it. (The administration loves those courses though, as I will explain later on.)

How would this work? Let's first consider the set of processes grouped under conscious processes:

Conscious Processes

Prediction is an area of life that is worth getting good at doing. Who, in the various faculties, organize their daily lives around predictions? Economists make predictions. It is what they do all the time. Medical doctors make predictions. Physicists make predictions. Political scientists make predictions. Let's imagine that students were taught by a team of people from these four areas who were the exactly those people who specialized in making predictions all the time in their careers. And, let's suppose that they created a year long course in how to make predictions based on known evidence, past cases, and pushing the boundaries of what is known. Wouldn't this be a better course than *Introduction to Physics*? The teachers could introduce whatever aspects of physics they wanted to help students understand the predictive process in that area, but other faculty who did prediction in other areas would be part of the discussion. There would be a set of interesting issues ranging from predictions that were thought to be right but weren't to predicting one's that are being made today in each area. The idea would be that the content is the predictive process itself not the traditional subject matter. Statistics (and other useful tools) would be taught in this context while the predictive process was being studied.

Judgment

Law is not typically part of any college curriculum because law schools are recent inventions on college campuses (that is they are from the last century and not the century before) so they never got to be part of the college set of courses despite the fact that so many students want to be lawyers. Judges make judgments all the time and those lawyers who teach judges to make judgment should be teaching freshman to make judgments as well. Of course, artists and musicians and literary critics make judgments of a different sort, as do philosophers and business people. All of the people could be teaching a course together on how to make judgments fairly and how to determine what is fair. This is where ethics and morality come into play as well.

Modeling

Who build models? Psychologists think about models of the mind, as do Computer Scientists and Philosophers who specialize in thinking about thinking. Architects and Economists build models of a different sort. Engineers work with models regularly. All of these people use different modeling tools but they work on the same thing: trying to figure out how something works by building it and seeing if they can replicate it. They may be using a computer or building blocks or electricity or art. It makes no difference. It is all an attempt to see how things work by building some facsimile. This is an important idea in human thinking and a course should be taught to undergraduates on how to do it by the people who actually do it, teaching different techniques as they go. They are many ways to build a model and students in college should know the possibilities before they take on further study.

Experimentation

Psychologists do experiments. Chemists do experiments. Physicists do experiments. Medical researchers do experiments. (The drug companies are constantly doing experiments that affect us all.) Why is there no course in learning how to do an experiment? Shouldn't students be learning how to come up with a hypothesis and how to test that hypothesis? Isn't that more important as a fundamental building block of the mind than any course offered to freshman in college today?

5. Describing

Literature departments are all about describing. So are drama departments, communication departments, philosophy departments, and art departments. And, to be clear, so are all science departments. All of these departments have people within them who are worried about how to say what you want to say and how to effectively communicate to others. They criticize people who are bad at description on a regular basis. Students need to need to learn to write but they also need to learn to talk and to use alternative media to make their points and to explain what they have done. A coherent course of study in how to describe properly is easily within the ability of any college faculty and ought to be is highest priority, taught from any different points of view, teaching what description is about not how to work PowerPoint.

Managing

Business people study management. Business courses have made their way into many college campuses but the Ivy League colleges are still hold-outs. Business is looked down upon as a non-academic subject. Political scientists study how governments are managed. Historians study how governments, battles, cities, and a range of other things have been managed. Architects and Urban Planners and Engineers worry about management. All of these people could combine to teach students how to manage others (as well as themselves.) This is very important part of functioning in any society.

First College Year Summary

It would be my contention that a freshman year made up of these six processes, taught in six simultaneous courses that were designed to relate to each other in various ways and at specific times, would be a wonderful thing for teaching people how to think. The best of our faculty can

teach what they think about to students who are now ready to start to thinking rigorously. By the end of this first year, students could begin to specialize, not in academic subjects just yet, but in other processes that build on the conscious processes.

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