

Comprehensive Plan for Growth

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Introduction

Morningside College reached an enrollment milestone in the fall of 2009: 1,200 full-time undergraduate students. The significance of that number is fully appreciated when you remember that not long ago – the fall of 2001 – we reported a full-time undergraduate enrollment of only 744 students. This 61 percent increase in enrollment, along with the most successful fund-raising campaign in Morningside history, transformed Morningside. We became financially sound, took pride in a physically refreshed campus and were supported by a confident, focused group of staff, faculty and alumni.

We had identified 1,200 as the “ideal size” for Morningside, and for the past 10 years our admissions efforts focused on achieving that goal without compromising the academic profile of our entering classes. Reaching that enrollment level was a critical element in building the synergy necessary to make the much-needed improvements to the residential and educational experiences for our students that we identified back in 2000.

Once again, enrollment growth will be an important factor in moving us toward the Morningside we envision for 2020. That is why the administration is presenting this comprehensive plan to enroll 1,400 full-time undergraduate students by the fall of 2015. This new “ideal size” for Morningside builds upon our recent success and will provide some of the financial resources necessary to help us take our institution to the next level.

Enrollment drives our financial viability, providing approximately 80 percent of our annual revenue. Enrollment growth also builds confidence in donors’ minds, which will be critical as we plan for the next campaign. Increasing enrollment by 200 students over six years will generate significant additional revenue to enrich Morningside’s academic programs and enhance co-curricular activities. Perhaps most important, the additional enrollment revenue will allow us to focus our next fund-raising campaign on endowment and facilities.

Enhancements to our facilities and to the student experience – both in and out of the classroom – will help increase the value of the Morningside experience. Our long-term success hinges on providing increased value for prospective students and their parents. But we continue to face competitive challenges in our efforts to grow enrollment and to raise the bar higher for the type of experience we offer students. Those challenges include:

- a national and state economy still struggling to recover from a severe downturn,
- cuts in the Iowa Tuition Grant Program,

- cooperation and partnerships between community colleges and Iowa’s Regents-supported universities,
- an increased public focus on higher education as a commodity rather than the achievement of learning outcomes, and
- increased competition from for profit and online providers of higher education.

While we have accomplished much at Morningside, we cannot afford to be complacent. To that end, we have sharpened our vision for Morningside’s future: *To be one of the top ten Midwest regional colleges as reported in U.S. News & World Report by 2020.* To make this vision a reality, we must continue to meet our established benchmarks, create a distinctive student experience, invest in additional facility enhancements, build the endowment and improve our stature and reputation. The chart that appears at the end of this introduction, “The 2020 Picture of Morningside,” summarizes the elements that must come together to fulfill this vision of our future.

In the sections that follow, we present

- an enrollment model that outlines the process for reaching the 1,400 enrollment goal;
- an analysis of faculty staffing, classroom/course scheduling and plans to house additional students on the campus;
- financial ramifications;
- and a re-examination of our aspirant group of colleges.

The 2020 Picture of Morningside

<u>Benchmarks</u>	<u>Enhanced Student Experience Considerations</u>	<u>Facility Enhancements</u>
Enrollment Fundraising Net Position Salaries Financial Aid/Pricing Student/Faculty Ratio	First Year Advisors Center for Ethics & Leadership <u>Curricular Enhancement</u> Sexy Sophomore Experience Composition and Rhetoric Dept Social Science Dept Liberal Studies Major Required Study Abroad/Internships Language Opportunities Annual Themes/Convocations Enhanced Fine Arts Opportunities Learning Communities/Linked Courses On-Line Summer Courses	Dimmitt Renovation New Academic Building Completion of Master Plan Eppley Renovation Art Annex Infrastructure
<u>Endowment</u>		<u>Stature</u>
\$75-100 million by 2020		Own “Top of Mind” in our 2-hr radius region Placement in National Publication (2x/year) US News & World Report Peer Evaluation of 3.5 or Better

Mission (revised)

The Morningside College experience cultivates a passion for life-long learning, cultural understanding and a dedication to ethical leadership and civic responsibility.

Vision (revised)

The College is a student-centered participatory community, offering a liberal arts curriculum combined with a diverse array of practical experiences. The goal is the development of the whole person through an emphasis on critical thinking, effective communication, cultural understanding, practical wisdom, spiritual discernment, environmental literacy, and ethical action. The Morningside College graduate is equipped for both personal and professional success.

How Will We Grow?

Controlled, planned enrollment growth to 1,400 full-time undergraduate students by the fall of 2015 will provide additional revenue to fund a variety of enhancements to Morningside's academic programs and co-curricular activities. To reach this enrollment goal, we have projected annual enrollment growth over the next six years.

Fall of...	Projected Freshmen	Projected FT Fall Enrollment
2010	360	1,220
2011	370	1,270
2012	375	1,320
2013	380	1,360
2014	385	1,380
2015	385	1,400
Assumes 65 transfers each year and 74.5% average retention from year one to year two.		

To achieve these enrollment goals, we are focusing on a three-part strategy.

1. Increase the number of applications from prospective students. A significant increase in the total number of quality applications is essential to achieving our annual freshmen enrollment targets. Last year Morningside entered into a contract with Royall & Company of Richmond, Virginia, to support our efforts to increase the number of freshmen applications for admission. The Royall partnership has resulted in a dramatic rise in applications for the fall of 2010. The chart below projects the critical elements of enrollment growth.

Fall of...	Applications	Visits	Enrolled
2004	1,182	663	316
2005	1,296	727	309
2006	1,332	792	332
2007	1,334	722	290
2008	1,354	794	302
2009	1,554	778	325
2010	2,000	820	360
2011	2,050	835	370
2012	2,100	850	375
2013	2,150	870	380
2014	2,200	890	385
2015	2,250	900	385

2. Expand music, dance and theatre programs. Opportunities to expand fine arts programs in music, dance and theatre also will aid our enrollment efforts. Building on the popularity of competitive dance in our region, we are adding a competitive dance/cheer program at Morningside and hiring a full-time person to coordinate the program and recruit students. The expansion of Morningside's theatre department with additional faculty and staff will allow the department to increase the number of productions and intensify efforts to recruit students interested in theatre production and performance. Finally, our music department will continue to emphasize instrumental and choral ensembles, and a current open faculty position will be filled with an individual capable of reinvigorating our jazz program.

3. Create a distinctive academic experience. Curriculum revisions and enhancements that will create a distinctive academic experience for students are critical to achieving our goals. William Deeds, dean of the college, has proposed a process for curriculum revision at Morningside. His proposal is included in the appendix of this document. He points out that Morningside is a very different institution than it was in 2003, the last time we revised our curriculum. We have more students, and the academic profile of our students has improved. In addition, more than half of our full-time faculty did not have a voice in the design of our current curriculum because they came to Morningside after the process was completed. Data from assessment of student engagement and learning at Morningside also indicate that our curriculum is effective in some respects, but less effective in others. Finally, continued discussion among the nation's leading academics and higher education associations has focused on essential learning outcomes at our nation's colleges and universities. (As an example, see the article "What Should Colleges Teach?" by Stanley Fish included in the appendix). All of these factors, individually and together, make curriculum revision and enhancement at Morningside a necessity.

Ramifications of Growth

An increase in full-time undergraduate enrollment of 200 students over the next six years will have an impact on staffing and facilities at Morningside. In order to support a growing student population – even at an average annual increase of approximately 30 new students – we must examine faculty and non-faculty staffing levels and evaluate our classroom and residential facilities.

Staffing

One principle will guide the addition of new faculty and staff: Increases in the number of employees will be in response to, rather than in anticipation of, growth in the numbers of students. This means our desired staffing levels will lag to some extent behind the actual increase in students.

The table on page 9 summarizes our staffing plan for meeting enrollment growth.

Faculty

In 2003, the faculty revised the curriculum; and the teaching load for tenure-track faculty at Morningside College was changed from 24 credits per year to 20 credits per year plus one May Term course every three years. Coincident with that change, and informed by the comparison group of colleges at that time, the target of a 16 to 1 full-time student to full-time faculty ratio was established. As enrollments have grown, the target has been met and exceeded. There were 1,200 full-time undergraduate students and 70 full-time faculty members at Morningside College in the fall of 2009. These numbers yield a student-to-faculty ratio of 17.4 to 1. It is important to note that 72 full-time faculty positions were authorized, but two were unfilled at the start of the 2009-2010 academic year (one position was open due to a late resignation, and the other was open due to a failed search the previous year).

The planned student-to-faculty ratio of 16 to 1 indicates that 75 faculty positions are necessary for the current number of 1,200 full-time students. Consequently, three new faculty positions have been added for 2010-2011. One position would focus on teaching human anatomy. The other two positions would focus on writing and rhetoric.

The Dean of the College, in consultation with Faculty Senate and the Deans' Council, decided which positions to add. The decision was based on current enrollment pressures and on

which positions would most effectively move the college toward the goals described in *Enhancing the Morningside Journey: Moving Forward to 2020*.

There has been steadily increasing demand for human anatomy as both the biology and nursing programs have grown. The number of graduates in biology have increased from 7 in 2004-05 to 38 in 2009-09, a 443 percent increase. Likewise the numbers of graduates in nursing have gone from 15 in 2004-05 to 25 in 2008-09, a 67 percent increase (Morningside College Fact Book 2009-2010). A series of part-time faculty members have served as the instructors in the human anatomy course and the effectiveness of these instructors has been an ongoing concern. The course load for teaching human anatomy has grown to 14 credits each academic year. The need for a full-time faculty member to teach human anatomy is overwhelming.

Enhancing the Journey, approved by the Board in May of 2009, calls for adding a number of non-tenure track appointments to teach a new year-long first year seminar focusing heavily on writing and rhetoric. Adding two faculty who specialize in writing/rhetoric will provide the college with additional sources of expertise on how best to achieve this goal and will be the beginning of a new academic department focused on writing and rhetoric. (See the article “Writing is Not Just a Basic Skill” by Mark Richardson that is included in the appendix.) And, we are recommending that these positions be tenure track positions. These two new faculty members will also be of great assistance as the faculty begins to discuss curriculum revision. The teaching load for each of the two positions would include two sections of Passport and two sections of Composition & Communications each year within our current curriculum. This will allow for much more flexibility in addressing pressure points by freeing faculty from their Passport and Composition & Communications responsibilities in those departments with high demand due to growth in majors, or to more easily allow for sabbaticals within departments. Such flexibility will be very useful as the gradual growth in numbers of students occurs.

As the number of full-time students continues to increase, the process established for 2010-2011 will continue. The number of faculty positions in a given year will be based on the number of full-time students in the previous academic year. Once that number is determined, the Dean of the College will consult with Faculty Senate and with the Deans’ Council about which positions to add. The decision will be based on maintaining or enhancing the quality of the academic experience for students. Thus, current enrollment pressures, curriculum developments,

and the goals of the strategic plan will be considered. The positions selected will be those that most enhance the quality of the academic experience for our students.

Staff

The addition of new, non-faculty positions is guided by this principle: All new positions must help either (1) enhance revenue generation, or (2) enhance the quality of the student experience.

Most of the increase in staff positions at Morningside took place since the fall of 2001 as we built our full-time undergraduate enrollment from its low point of 744 students to the current level of 1,200 students. During that period, staff growth occurred in areas that had a direct impact on the student experience (student services, athletics and custodial/maintenance) or in our graduate education program, which tripled in size over the last six years.

Going forward, staff additions will continue to take place in those areas that directly enhance the student experience, such as the five full-time positions planned for the advising center in the 2012-13 academic year. (See staffing plan table on the following page)

**Morningside College
Employee Staffing Plan**

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>10-11</u>	<u>11-12</u>	<u>12-13</u>	<u>13-14</u>	<u>14-15</u>
Begin Position	151.90	158.40	160.40	166.40	166.40
 <u>Staff Plan</u>					
* Res. Life - Area Coordinator - Leadership	1.00				
FT Graduate Dean for Education	1.00				
FT Dance	1.00				
FT Physical Plant	1.00				
FT 10-Mo. Secretary - Walker Science	1.00				
PT - Grad - Financial Aid	0.50				
PT-FT Secretary - Athletics	0.50				
PT-FT Theatre Department	0.50				
FT Business Office		1.00			
FT Assoc - Athletic Director		1.00			
FT Advising Center			5.00		
FT Compliance			1.00		
Total Staff Plan	<u>158.40</u>	<u>160.40</u>	<u>166.40</u>	<u>166.40</u>	<u>166.40</u>
 <u>Faculty Plan</u>					
Begin Position	72.00	75.00	77.00	80.00	83.00
FT Faculty Position	1.00				
FT Faculty Position	1.00				
FT Faculty Position	1.00				
FT Faculty Position		1.00			
FT Faculty Position		1.00			
FT Faculty Position			1.00		
FT Faculty Position			1.00		
FT Faculty Position			1.00		
FT Faculty Position				1.00	
FT Faculty Position				1.00	
FT Faculty Position				1.00	
FT Faculty Position					1.00
FT Faculty Position					1.00
FT Faculty Position					1.00
Total Faculty Plan	<u>75.00</u>	<u>77.00</u>	<u>80.00</u>	<u>83.00</u>	<u>86.00</u>
 Total Employees	 <u>233.40</u>	 <u>237.40</u>	 <u>246.40</u>	 <u>249.40</u>	 <u>252.40</u>

* Filling a vacant position

Facilities

Housing

To be one of the 10 best Midwest regional colleges, Morningside must continue to be a residential college. To accommodate a growing student enrollment, we must:

- review and revise student housing policies,
- reclaim current residential living space that is being used for other purposes,
- and add some new beds without building a new dorm or apartment.

Our current residence capacity on campus is 835 beds (3 residence halls and 3 apartments). Based on a four-year average (2006-2009), approximately 65 percent of full-time students live on campus. A fall 2010 enrollment of 1,220 full-time students indicates that we will need 793 beds (1,200 x 65 percent). This is well within our existing capacity.

Looking out to the fall of 2015 when we have set our enrollment goal as 1,400 full-time students, this same formula (1,400 x 65 percent) indicates we will need 910 beds to accommodate our residential students. The table below shows how we plan to have that many beds available by 2015.

	Beds	
Action	835	<i>Current capacity</i>
Homes on Garretson Avenue (senior themed housing)	24	
Reclaim the admissions “show” room	2	
Use six apartments in Dimmitt Hall as wellness apartments for upper class students	6	
Allow transfer students in Dimmitt guest rooms and do not offer on-campus housing to transfer students with junior/senior status	18	
Dimmitt renovation project	32	
	917	<i>New capacity</i>

Parking

Additional parking spaces will become available to students when the college demolishes homes it owns along South Cornelia Street between Peters Avenue and Laurel Avenue.

Dining

We will take several steps to ease pressure on the Olsen Student Center dining hall.

- Revisions being considered for the course schedule, starting in the 2011-12 academic year, will eliminate the current situation where Passport and Composition & Communications classes for all freshmen students end at the same time during lunch.
- Dining hall hours will be expanded.
- Plans for the Dimmitt Hall renovation include adding a dining facility.

Classrooms and course scheduling

Existing classroom facilities can adequately handle a full-time student enrollment of 1,400 students. However, the administration plans several actions related to classroom space and course scheduling that will increase options available for our students and the college.

Course scheduling

Planned revisions to the academic schedule, starting with the 2011-12 year, will expand the number of class time blocks available each day to accommodate a weekly, campus-wide convocation period. This revision also will allow courses with more than one section each semester to schedule classes during the late afternoon time block traditionally reserved for athletics and other co-curricular activities such as choir. Using MATH 115 as just one example, students not involved in co-curricular activities will have the option of registering for the late afternoon section of this class, and students with co-curricular activities in the afternoon can register for the section held in the morning. Under our existing class schedule, both sections of MATH 115 are held back-to-back in the morning.

We also are studying the feasibility of increasing the number of evening courses to provide more scheduling options.

Classroom facilities

Three opportunities exist for adding classrooms at Morningside.

1. Preliminary plans for the next capital campaign include construction of a new academic building on campus. The addition of this building will allow us to create more flexible classrooms to accommodate a variety of class sizes.
2. We are pursuing an agreement with Grace United Methodist Church that will give the college access to two classrooms in the church's education wing and allow us to build an education wing addition to house the college's Center for Ethics and Leadership.

3. We have had preliminary discussions with the Sioux City Community School District on its plans for Longfellow Elementary School, which is located next to our campus. The school district plans to close Longfellow when a new elementary school is constructed on another site in the city's Morningside area. Longfellow may allow us to utilize some classroom space for expanding art studios and classrooms.

Also, we are in the process of evaluating furniture used in all existing classrooms and exploring options that will offer maximum flexibility in configuring classrooms to accommodate more students and to allow for a variety of pedagogies.

Financial Ramifications

Based on a set of operating assumptions, an enrollment of 1,400 full-time undergraduate students will generate an additional \$2 million in net revenue by 2015. We will continue to follow the Morningside College Board of Directors' policy that allocates 50 percent of our net surplus position each year to reduce past debt and 50 percent to invest in enhancing the quality of the educational experience. This will allow the college to invest in our strategic plan initiatives, salaries and budgets.

Comparative Groups

Our Vision: To be one of the top ten Midwest regional colleges as reported in U.S. News & World Report by 2020.

Morningside College's vision statement challenges us to stretch our goals and achieve a potential few thought possible just a decade ago when we first established a group of peer and aspirant colleges. The selection of comparative groups is critical for two reasons: (1) a comparative group can focus us on the variables of most importance; and (2) a comparative group can be a yardstick to judge our progress. Because of the significant progress Morningside continues to make, we must periodically re-examine the list of colleges we aspire to be like.

In order to accomplish our vision of what we want to be in ten years, a direct comparison with the top Midwest baccalaureate schools as ranked by U.S. News & World Report seems appropriate. Currently, Morningside's aspirant group is comprised of nine area schools, three of which (Augustana, Dordt, Northwestern) U.S. News ranks as among the top ten Midwest baccalaureate colleges.

The U.S. News/proposed aspirant group and the current aspirant group are as follows:

U.S. NEWS TOP 10 MIDWEST (2010)

Augustana College (SD)
Dordt College (IA)
Northwestern College (IA)
Taylor University (IN)
Ohio Northern University (OH)
Buena Vista University (IA)
Huntington University (IN)
Marietta College (OH)
College of the Ozarks (MO)
Loras College (IA)

ASPIRANT

Augustana College (SD)
Dordt College (IA)
Northwestern College (IA)
Central College (IA)
Cornell College (IA)
Hastings College (NE)
Nebraska Wesleyan University (NE)
Simpson College (IA)
Wartburg College (IA)

The table below compares several significant variables that U.S. News considers to be indicators of quality. The variables of most importance to Morningside's goal to improve its U.S. News ranking are peer assessment, freshmen return rate and graduation rate. These three variables constitute 50 percent of the overall score U.S. News calculates to determine its best colleges rankings.

	Present Comparison Group	U.S. News Comparison Group	Difference	Morningside
Peer Assessment (25%)	2.97 (n=9)	3.38 (n=10)	+.41*	3.2
Freshman Return Rate (5%)	.79 (n=9)	.79 (n=10)	.00	.71
Graduation Rate (6 Yr.) (20%)	.65 (n=9)	.64 (n=10)	-.01	.48
Student/Faculty# Ratio (1%)	13.22 (n=9)	12.6 (n=10)	+.62	17
ACT 25th Percentile (4%)	21.67 (n=9)	21.1 (n=10)	-.57	20
ACT 75th Percentile (4%)	27.56 (n=9)	26.8 (n=10)	-.76	25
Professor Salary**	\$68,000 (n=9)	\$69,000 (n=10)	+\$1,000	\$64,000
Assoc. Prof. Salary**	\$56,000 (n=9)	\$57,000 (n=10)	+\$1,000	\$55,000
Asst. Prof Salary**	\$47,000 (n=9)	\$48,000 (n=10)	+\$1,000	\$46,000
Endowment*** (May 31, 2008)	\$55,529,000 (n=9)	\$73,355,000 (n=8)	+\$16,847,000	\$36,888,000
FT Enrollment*** (Fall 2008)	1,404 (n=9)	1,457 (n=10)	+53	1,158

All averages are means.

A lower number is associated with higher quality.

* Significantly different.

** Faculty Compensation contributes 7 percent to the U.S. News rankings.

*** Endowment and full-time enrollment are not used by U.S. News in their rankings.

Key Performance (Dashboard) Indicators with Five-Year Projections and 2015 Targets (February 2010)

Indicator	Measurement	Most Recent			Projected Values					May 2015 Target
		May-09			May-10	May-11	May-12	May-13	May-14	
		Target	Actual	Difference						
Net Position	Net position (Board discretionary funds)	\$778,000	\$564,343	-213,657	\$740,000	\$500,000	\$700,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,700,000
Fundraising	Campaign progress	\$30,000,000	\$45,200,000	15,200,000	tba	tba	tba	tba	tba	tba
	Annual fund	\$1,463,000	\$1,465,771	2,771	\$1,500,000	\$1,545,000	\$1,591,350	\$1,639,090	\$1,688,260	\$1,738,900
	Percent alumni giving	28%	27%	-1%	24%	24%	25%	25%	26%	26%

Indicator	Measurement	Most Recent			Projected Values					May 2015 Target
		Sep-09			Sep-10	Sep-11	Sep-12	Sep-13	Sep-14	
		Target	Actual	Difference						
Enrollment	Full-time undergraduates	1,180	1,200	20	1,220	1,270	1,320	1,360	1,380	1,400
Applications & Visits	Applications	1,375	1,554	179	2,000	2,050	2,100	2,150	2,200	2,250
	Visits	735	778	43	820	835	850	870	890	900
Academic Profile of New Students	Percent with high school rank in top 25%	45%	41%	-4%	45%	48%	48%	52%	54%	57%
	ACT Composite score, 25th percentile	20	20	0	20	20	20	21	21	21
	ACT Composite score, 75 percentile	25	25	0	25	26	26	26	26	26
Graduation & Retention	Retention rate	74%	73%	-1%	74%	75%	76%	77%	77%	77%
	Four-year graduation rate	39%	46%	7%	39%	40%	40%	44%	47%	54%
	Six-year graduation rate	52%	47%	-5%	52%	54%	54%	58%	60%	65%

Indicator	Measurement	Most Recent			Projected Values					Dec. 2015 Target
		Dec-09			Dec-10	Dec-11	Dec-12	Dec-13	Dec-14	
		Target	Actual	Difference						
Endowment	Endowment	\$31,084,000	\$33,720,000	2,636,000	\$35,175,000	\$36,848,000	\$38,542,000	\$40,291,000	\$42,097,000	\$43,962,000

Conclusion

The enrollment growth we seek over the next six years is not dramatic, but neither is it “a walk in the park.” At a time of significant decline in the number of 18 year olds in the Midwest and an ever declining percentage of those 18 year olds attending private colleges, there are some who might even suggest that projecting enrollment growth is foolish.

However, we also have never more firmly believed that the higher education marketplace truly seeks value. For prospective students and their parents, value is defined by a high quality, personalized experience at an affordable price that leads to a successful outcome: a job or graduate school of choice. (See the article “Making College ‘Relevant’” included in the appendix.)

Enhancing the Morningside Journey: Moving Forward to 2020, the update of our strategic plan, provides an outline for building a Morningside experience that offers students the educational value they seek. Likewise, “The 2020 Picture of Morningside” on page 3 of this document summarizes how we can achieve our vision: *To be one of the top ten Midwest regional colleges as reported in U.S. News & World Report by 2020.*

The document you have in front of you addresses one important element of building the Morningside we envision for 2020 – controlled, planned enrollment growth to 1,400 full-time undergraduate students. We have explained our plan for achieving and supporting this increase in student numbers, which will play an important part in providing some of the financial resources we need to help take Morningside to the next level.

This comprehensive plan for growth and the update to our strategic plan are maps for reaching a destination. No doubt, we may need to make corrections along the way. But it is vital that we begin the journey. Being content with the status quo is not an option. Since 2000, Morningside has accomplished much and celebrated many successes; however, other private colleges are also working hard to meet the demands of the marketplace, and they also are marking their own successes.

We can achieve what we envision for this institution. The key is accountability – on the part of the board, senior leadership, staff and faculty – to meet the annual goals we have established.

Literature Review/Appendix

- 1. A Call for Curriculum Revision by William C. Deeds, Ph.D.**
- 2. What Should Colleges Teach? by Stanley Fish**
- 3. Writing Is Not Just a Basic Skill by Mark Richardson**
- 4. Making College ‘Relevant’ by Kate Zernike**

A Call for Curriculum Revision
Morningside College
January 2010

William C. Deeds, Ph.D.
Dean of the College

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year, I shared the goals for Academic Affairs with the Morningside College community. The first goal on the list was:

Work with CPC to develop a process and timeline for curriculum revision. Report the process to the faculty by the April 2010 Faculty Meeting.

Since that time, you have heard from the President that our vision is to be one of the top ten Midwest Colleges as reported in US News & World Report by 2020 and the Board has charged the senior administration with developing a plan for growth to 1400 students by 2015. Curriculum revision will be instrumental in achieving these goals.

The most recent curriculum revision at Morningside College was approved by the faculty in January of 2003. Curriculum revision at that time was driven by the necessity to help the college survive and was initiated by the strategic plan approved by the Board in October of 2000. This plan identified new mission and vision statements, called for a reduction in faculty positions from 79 to 63 by eliminating some academic programs and pruning others, and specified that institutional planning should be an ongoing enterprise. The Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) worked under intense time pressure and generated a curriculum proposal, based on the new mission and vision statements, which was both radical and pragmatic.

This curriculum was designed to produce eight educational outcomes for graduates of Morningside College. The proposal called for a move from a 3-credit standard to a 4-credit standard for courses; redefined the B.A. and B.S degrees; identified a set of distribution and flag requirements; added a May Term requirement; specified the development of two new first year courses with priority staffing; and required that majors contribute to the delivery of a subset of the educational outcomes. Further, this proposal modified the faculty course load to 20 hours per academic year plus one May Term course every three years.

The curriculum proposal that was approved in 2003 has served us well, although it is not without its problems. Curriculum revision is less urgent now than it was in 2003, but it is no less important. Appropriate and timely revisions to the curriculum are critical to achieving our goals. The purpose of this paper is to initiate a new curriculum revision effort at Morningside College. In the following sections of this paper I will attempt to identify why curriculum revision is called for at this time, specify who should lead the college in the curriculum revision effort, and identify how the curriculum revision process might proceed.

Why We Need to Revise the Curriculum Now

Morningside College is a very different place now than it was when the last curriculum proposal was approved. We are more stable financially. We have more full-time undergraduate students now (1200) than we had then (806) and the academic profile of our students has improved. More than half of the current full-time faculty were not here when the current curriculum was designed. The strategic plan approved by the Board in May 2009 recommends a review of the mission and vision statements and suggests some curricular enhancements. We have data from the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* and the *Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)*, as well as our own assessment data, which indicate that our curriculum is effective in some respects, but less effective in others. Any one of these factors could be a reason for curriculum revision; their confluence demands a thorough review of our curriculum.

The curriculum that was approved in 2003 was intentionally pragmatic. We designed a course of studies for our fewer than 1000 undergraduate students that we knew we would be able to adequately staff with 63 faculty. Since that time, both the number of undergraduate students and the number of faculty have increased. Pressure points in our curriculum have also developed. Although we have been able to meet the needs of our students, it has become increasingly difficult to staff a sufficient number of sections of Passport and C&C, distribution and flag requirements, and courses required in our majors. A thorough review of our curriculum with appropriate modifications should ensure that we are able to continue to staff the courses that our students need to graduate in four years.

37 of our 70 faculty members began their full-time employment with Morningside College in Fall 2002 or later and did not have a hand in designing our current curriculum. Half (35) of our current full-time faculty had no opportunity to vote on the current curriculum. This reason alone justifies an effort to revise our curriculum to better utilize the interests and abilities of the faculty.

Enhancing the Morningside Journey: Moving Forward to 2020 is the current update of the Morningside College strategic plan and was approved by the Board in May, 2009. This document recommends a review of the current mission and vision statements. Proposed modifications to these statements are likely this academic year. In addition, the strategic plan suggests the consideration of a number of curricular enhancements including an international experience requirement, a structured experiential learning requirement (e.g. internship, practicum, or student teaching), the creation of a new year-long first-year seminar, and the development of a consistent set of expectations for 100 level courses. Some of this work is already underway. A dedicated group of faculty is looking at recommendations for 100 level courses and has reported their recommendations to CPC. Further consideration of these curricular enhancements will require a formal process for curriculum revision.

Morningside has administered the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* three times (2003, 2006, and 2009) and we will have two years of data from the *Collegiate Learning Assessment* at the conclusion of the current academic year. The work begun by the Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) and continued by the Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL) to determine how well we are delivering the eight educational outcomes also adds to the data we have available on the effectiveness of our curriculum. *NSSE* data indicate that we succeed at providing some enriching educational experiences and we provide opportunities for active and collaborative learning. However, the *NSSE* data also show that our level of academic challenge could be improved. Preliminary analyses of the *CLA* results show that our students improve in making and critiquing arguments while at Morningside, but there is room for further improvement on these and other skills. CASL has begun to organize and analyze the results from the assessment forms completed by instructors of courses which fill distribution and flag requirements. All of these results suggest that it is time to reconsider how our curriculum is constructed.

Much has occurred at Morningside College to warrant a revision of the curriculum. Concurrent with the developments at Morningside, there has been an ongoing discussion in higher education about essential learning outcomes. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)¹ has led this discussion with their *Greater Expectations: the Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College*² initiative and report and, most recently, with the publication of *College Learning for the New Global Century*,³ which summarizes the work of the National Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). This work identifies a number of essential learning outcomes and describes a set of principles of excellence for higher education. The work of AAC&U and LEAP should be reviewed and, where appropriate, should influence the curricula at colleges and universities in the U.S. including Morningside College. This is yet another reason that it is an appropriate time to review and revise the curriculum at Morningside College.

Who Should Lead the College in the Curriculum Revision Effort

There are many reasons why we should begin the process of curriculum revision at this time and the question of who should lead this effort is important. The faculty are, appropriately, in charge of the curriculum and should drive this initiative. The Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) is comprised of those faculty members elected to represent their colleagues in all things curricular and might appear to be the best group to focus on a curricular review and revision. While I see a role for CPC in this process, I am recommending the creation of a special task force of faculty to direct the curriculum revision effort. CPC should be involved in the selection of this group and I certainly hope that some faculty with CPC experience apply to join the task force. However, it is clear that CPC is fully occupied handling the day to day business of the current curriculum. Their work will only increase as we begin to add faculty, continue to modify the requirements for majors and clusters, and add additional courses to satisfy distribution and flag requirements in the current curriculum. CPC does not have the

bandwidth to take on this project. Also, as a standing committee, the membership on CPC routinely changes and assimilating new members may disrupt or slow down the process of curricular review as the group has to recover old ground to bring the new members up to speed.

A special task force will attract those faculty most interested in, knowledgeable about, and committed to the process of curriculum revision. My recommendation is for CPC to solicit applications from our faculty. The applications should detail why the applicant is interested in serving on the task force, the specific skills and experiences that the applicant has to offer, and a commitment to work on this project at least through the fall of 2012 including the summers of 2010, 2011, and 2012 (primarily during the months of June and July). Those faculty selected would have the option of counting service on the task force as their committee service during the academic year and they would be compensated \$4000 for each summer of service. Faculty who apply for the task force should affirm that they do not plan to apply for or take a sabbatical or other leave during the period from Spring 2010 through Fall 2012 and that they do not plan to teach summer courses during the three summers in question. I realize that this caveat removes those already approved for leaves from Spring 2010 through Spring 2011 from eligibility to serve on the task force. These conditions assure that all of the task force members will be able to fully focus on the task at hand, especially during the summer months. The work of the task force will be arduous, but fulfilling, and will be critically important for Morningside College.

CPC would select the members of the task force from those who apply for service. Ideally, the task force would be comprised of 11 voting faculty members. This size would enable the group to withstand some inevitable attrition, but not be so large as to be unwieldy. I would recommend against adding additional members midstream to replace any who leave the group. CPC, in consultation with the Dean of the College, would endeavor to select a group that is representative of the entire faculty and balanced on a number of variables including academic discipline, gender, years of service to the College, and expertise. CPC may need to recruit additional individuals to apply in order to achieve the necessary representativeness. The Dean of the College would serve on the task force as an *ex officio* and non-voting member. Other administrators or staff members might also serve in an *ex officio* non-voting capacity or be called as "expert witnesses." CPC would bring the selected membership of the task force to the faculty for endorsement early in the Spring 2010 semester. This group would work creatively to develop a contemporary curriculum for Morningside College.

Let me be clear about my role on this group. As the Chief Academic Officer of the Institution, it is critical that I am actively involved in the curriculum revision process. The administration of the curriculum is ultimately my responsibility. That is precisely what the term *ex officio* means; my membership on this task force is called for because of my position. I also bring to the table much experience and knowledge about curricular issues in higher education and the specific curricular issues at Morningside College. I am told that some are concerned that my presence on this group will be intimidating or that I will have undue influence. I beg to differ. There are faculty who can confirm that

disagreeing with me (or agreeing with me, for that matter) has not influenced their treatment under the merit pay system. Rather, the rubric for performance by faculty members drives the merit pay evaluations. Further, my ability or inability to influence the deliberations of the task force are much more a function of the cogency my arguments rather than of the position that I hold. And that is as it should be. Finally, let me state again that I would be a non-voting member of this group and be clear that recommendations from the task force would come back to CPC and then be brought to the faculty for vote.

How the Curriculum Revision Process Might Proceed

It was noted above that the most recent curriculum revision was both radical and pragmatic. The curriculum review and revision effort described here is not likely to be as radical, but it should be creative, and it must continue to be pragmatic. Members of the task force on curriculum review will need to thoroughly familiarize themselves with our current curriculum and the pressure points associated with it; with the current strategic plan and the suggestions for curricular enhancements that it includes; with the survey and assessment of student learning data that have been collected and that inform us about the effectiveness of our curriculum; and with the ongoing conversation in higher education about curriculum revision and essential learning outcomes. Only then can they begin to discuss enhancements to our curriculum and bring their faculty colleagues into those discussions. As the work of this task force goes forward other developments, such as revisions to the mission and vision statements or the addition of new faculty members, will occur. The work of the task force will both inform and be informed by these other developments. This task force will need to be knowledgeable, deliberate, transparent, consultative, and creative as they recommend modifications to the current curriculum over time. While this group will interact directly with faculty in a variety of ways as their work proceeds, the curricular proposals generated will be sent back to CPC and then on to the faculty.

As soon as the faculty endorse the membership of the task force, I will send those selected individuals a set of materials to study in preparation for meetings of the task force. An additional set of these materials will be placed on reserve in the Learning Center for reference. These materials will include the curriculum proposal approved in January 2003; the current strategic plan, *Enhancing the Morningside Journey: Moving Forward to 2020*; a number of AAC&U publications; summaries of assessment data; and links to additional information. I intend to give the task force members enough time to digest the information they have received, and then call the task force together to formally give them their charge and lay out a tentative timeline for their work. I hope that this first meeting of the task force could occur prior to March 31, 2010. The task force will need to elect a chair, set future meeting times, and identify other information that they will require. The group would meet one or two more times during the Spring Term, and then begin meeting extensively during the summer.

The charge to the task force will not be to start from scratch. The curriculum revision process that I envision will result in some changes to our current curriculum, but it is more a process of enhancing what we have than beginning anew. We already have a set of eight educational outcomes that grew out of our mission and vision statements. We may, very well, modify the current outcomes; and we may even add an outcome or two, but we should aim for creative enhancements rather than a radical restructuring of the curriculum. For example, I do not think we should revisit the question of a 3-credit as opposed to a 4-credit standard. While we may want to enhance how we deliver our May Term courses, we should not seek to remove them. Likewise, I see our focus in this curriculum revision to be on the program of general education (and I sincerely hope we give it a name this time!), not on the requirements for majors. And it will be important to keep in mind who our students are as we revise the curriculum. While our profile is improving, this improvement is going to be very gradual. We should design a curriculum for the students we have, rather than for an idealized concept of what we might want them to be.

Some of the potential enhancements to the curriculum that merit our consideration are clear. The strategic plan identifies a number of these, including an international experience or a structured experiential learning requirement. Indeed, we need to carefully look at an enhanced first year program and explore increasing the number of 200 level courses and improving other offerings for sophomores. Other potential enhancements will be suggested by AAC&U initiatives such as LEAP and the ongoing curricular discussions that pervade higher education. We should be aware of best practices in higher education and take good ideas wherever we can find them. Ultimately, however, we must design a curriculum that works for Morningside College. That is, a curriculum which leverages our strengths, operates within our resource constraints, and benefits our students. The words of the chair of the CPC during the last curriculum revision continue to ring true: *“we can do anything that we want to do, but we cannot do everything that we want to do.”* That is why the work of the task force is so critically important.

While the timetable for the work of the task force is not set in stone, the groups needs to work deliberately and will likely recommend some enhancements earlier than others while keeping an eye on the overall picture. I would hope that the work of this group is completed by the Fall of 2012, but would welcome an earlier conclusion.

The task force will need to work very hard to generate creative ideas, maintain the interest and involvement of their faculty colleagues, and seek collaborative solutions to the problems that will be uncovered. This is why the work will be both arduous and fulfilling. This curriculum revision will be a significant component of Morningside College becoming one of the top ten Midwest regional colleges. I look forward to working with faculty colleagues on this task.

NOTES

1. The AAC&U has published an extensive series of reports on undergraduate education as part of their national campaign “Liberal Education & America’s Promise,” (LEAP). All of these reports are available at <http://www.aacu.org>.
2. *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College, A National Panel Report*, (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002).
3. *College Learning for the New Global Century, A National Report*, (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

What Should Colleges Teach?

By Stanley Fish

A few years ago, when I was grading papers for a graduate literature course, I became alarmed at the inability of my students to write a clean English sentence. They could manage for about six words and then, almost invariably, the syntax (and everything else) fell apart. I became even more alarmed when I remembered that these same students were instructors in the college's composition program. What, I wondered, could possibly be going on in their courses?

I decided to find out, and asked to see the lesson plans of the 104 sections. I read them and found that only four emphasized training in the craft of writing. Although the other 100 sections fulfilled the composition requirement, instruction in composition was not their focus. Instead, the students spent much of their time discussing novels, movies, TV shows and essays on a variety of hot-button issues — racism, sexism, immigration, globalization. These artifacts and topics are surely worthy of serious study, but they should have received it in courses that bore their name, if only as a matter of truth-in-advertising.

As I learned more about the world of composition studies, I came to the conclusion that unless writing courses focus exclusively on writing they are a sham, and I advised administrators to insist that all courses listed as courses in composition teach grammar and rhetoric and nothing else. This advice was contemptuously dismissed by the composition establishment, and I was accused of being a reactionary who knew nothing about current trends in research. Now I have received (indirect) support from a source that makes me slightly uncomfortable, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which last week issued its latest white paper, "What Will They Learn? A Report on General Education Requirements at 100 of the Nation's Leading Colleges and Universities."

Founded by Lynne Cheney and Jerry Martin in 1995, ACTA (I quote from its website) is "an independent, non-profit organization committed to academic freedom, excellence and accountability at America's colleges." Sounds good, but that "commitment" takes the form of mobilizing trustees and alumni in an effort to pressure colleges and universities to make changes in their curricula and requirements. Academic institutions, the ACTA website declares, "need checks

and balances” because “internal constituencies” — which means professors — cannot be trusted to be responsive to public concerns about the state of higher education.

The battle between those who actually work in the academy and those who would monitor academic work from the outside has been going on for well over 100 years and I am on record (in “Save The World On Your Own Time” and elsewhere) as being against external regulation of classroom practices if only because the impulse animating the effort to regulate is always political rather than intellectual.

It is of course true that political motives can also inform the decisions made by academic insiders; the professorial guild is far from pure. But the cure for the politicization of the classroom by some professors is not the counter-politicization urged by ACTA when it crusades for “accountability,” a code word for reconfiguring the academy according to conservative ideas and agendas.

Nevertheless, I found myself often nodding in agreement when I was reading ACTA’s new report. In it, the 100 colleges and universities are ranked on a scale from A to F based on whether students are required to take courses in seven key areas — composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. government or history, economics, mathematics and natural or physical science.

It’s hard to quarrel with this list; the quarrel and the criticism have been provoked by the criteria that accompany it. These criteria are stringent and narrow and have been criticized as parochial and motivated by nostalgia and politics; but in at least four of the seven areas they make perfect sense. Credit for requiring instruction in mathematics will not be given for linguistic courses or computer literacy courses because their “math content is usually minimal.” Credit for requiring instruction in the natural or physical sciences will not be given for courses with “weak scientific content” or courses “taught by faculty outside of the science departments” (i.e., the philosophy or history of science). Credit for requiring instruction in a foreign language will not be given for fewer than three semesters of study because it takes that long to acquire “competency at the intermediate level.” And credit for requiring composition will not be given for courses that are “writing intensive” (there is a significant amount of writing required but the focus is on some substantive topic), or for courses in disciplines other than English and composition (often termed “writing in the discipline” courses), or for courses in public speaking, or for remedial courses. In order to qualify, a course must be devoted to “grammar, style, clarity, and argument.”

The rationale behind these exclusions is compelling: mathematics, the natural sciences, foreign languages and composition are disciplines with a specific content and a repertoire of essential skills. Courses that center on another content and fail to provide concentrated training in those skills are really courses in another subject. You can tell when you are being taught a mathematical function or a scientific procedure or a foreign language or the uses of the subjunctive and when you are being taught something else.

Things are not so clear when it comes to literature and history. Why should the literature requirement be fulfilled only by “a comprehensive literary survey” and not by single-author courses (aren’t Shakespeare and Milton “comprehensive” enough), or by a course in the theater or the graphic novel or the lyrics of Bob Dylan (all rejected in the report)?

With respect to science, composition, foreign language instruction and mathematics, ACTA is simply saying, *Don’t slight the core of the discipline*. But when the report decrees that only broad surveys of literature can fulfill a literature requirement, the organization is intervening in the discipline and taking sides in its internal debates. Why should trustees and alumni have a say in determining whether the graphic novel — a multi-media art that goes back at least as far as William Blake — deserves to represent literature? (For the record, I think it does.) This part of the report is an effort to shape the discipline from the outside according to a political vision.

This holds too for the insistence that only the study of American history “in both chronological and thematic breadth” can fulfill the history requirement. Here the politics is explicit: such courses, we are told, are “indispensable for the formation of citizens and for the preservation of our free institutions.”

Indispensable I doubt (this is academic hubris); and while the formation of citizens and the preservation of our free institutions may be admirable aims, it is not the task of courses in history to achieve them. The question of how best to introduce students to the study of history should be answered not by invoking external goals, however worthy, but by arguing the merits of academic alternatives; and I see no obvious reason why a course on the Civil War or the American revolution or the French revolution (or both of them together) would not do the job as well as a survey stretching from the landing at Plymouth Rock to the war in Iraq. (At any rate, the issue is one for academic professionals to decide.)

But if I have no problem with alternative ways of teaching literature or history, how can I maintain (with ACTA) that there is only one way to teach writing? Easy. It can't be an alternative way of teaching writing to teach something else (like multiculturalism or social justice). It can, however, be an alternative way of teaching history to forgo a broad chronological narrative and confine yourself to a single period or even to a single world-changing event. It is the difference between not doing the job and getting the job done by another route.

This difference is blurred in ACTA report because it is running (and conflating) two arguments. One argument (with which I agree) says teach the subject matter and don't adulterate it with substitutes. The other argument says teach the subject matter so that it points in a particular ideological direction, the direction of traditional values and a stable canon. The first argument is methodological and implies no particular politics; the other is political through and through, and it is the argument the authors are finally committed to because they see themselves as warriors in the culture wars. The battle they are fighting in the report is over the core curriculum, the defense of which is for them a moral as well as an educational imperative as it is for those who oppose it.

The arguments pro and con are familiar. On one side the assertion that a core curriculum provides students with the distilled wisdom of the western tradition and prepares them for life. On the other side the assertion that a core curriculum packages and sells the prejudices and biases of the reigning elite and so congeals knowledge rather than advancing it.

Have we lost our way or finally found it? Thirty-five years ago there was no such thing as a gay and lesbian studies program; now you can build a major around it. For some this development is a sign that a brave new world has arrived; for others it marks the beginning of the end of civilization.

It probably is neither; curricular alternatives are just not that world-shaking. The philosophical baggage that burdens this debate should be jettisoned and replaced with a more prosaic question: What can a core curriculum do that the proliferation of options and choices (two words excoriated in the ACTA report) cannot? The answer to that question is given early in the report before it moves on to its more polemical pages. An "important benefit of a coherent core curriculum is its ability to foster a 'common conversation' among students, connecting them more closely with faculty and with each other."

The nice thing about this benefit is that it can be had no matter what the content of the core curriculum is. It could be the classics of western literature and

philosophy. It could be science fiction. It could be globalization. It could be anything so long as every student took it. But whatever it is, please let it include a writing course that teaches writing and not everything under the sun. That should be the real core of any curriculum.

Stanley Fish is a professor of law at Florida International University, in Miami, and dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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Writing Is Not Just a Basic Skill

By Mark Richardson

At many colleges, professors trained in the discipline of rhetoric and composition are finding that the specialized knowledge they bring to teaching writing is held in thrall to older notions of how we learn to write — what Linda Brodkey, an author and director of the Warren College Writing Program at the University of California at San Diego, calls "common-sense myths of literacy."

Such myths are pernicious. They poison colleges and universities, affecting the morale of writing instructors, the attitudes of other faculty members, and, worst of all, students' acquisition of literacy. We need to understand such myths and to dispel them, replacing them with a new approach to first-year composition and a new commitment to upper-level writing.

Common-sense myths of literacy are akin to other common-sense myths. The truth often turns out to be more complicated than we thought. For most of human history, for example, it was assumed that time moves at a steady, equal pace for everyone (unless you are waiting for water to boil). Then Einstein showed that time moves more slowly for a clock in motion than for one that is stationary, and our common-sense observation of time was proved wrong.

The "common-sense" viewpoint about learning to write was born in the late 1800s, as colleges adapted to the enormous social and educational changes taking place: industrialization; population growth and relocation; social mobility; coeducation; and the boom in knowledge that led to the birth of the modern academic disciplines. A changing society brought new students to campuses — students of widely varied social classes and levels of literacy, eager to fill the jobs created by the new industrial society. In 1874, responding to the influx of new students, Harvard University administered an entrance exam in literacy skills. Over half of the applicants who took it failed.

Colleges responded by creating composition courses. Harvard's new writing courses were taught not by a rhetorician or an English teacher, but by a newspaperman, Adams Sherman Hill. None of the other instructors of Harvard's composition courses had advanced degrees, either. In other words, "composition" was not a strategically planned curricular development,

nor did it evolve out of scholarship or pedagogical expertise. It was invented in a hurry to resolve a perceived crisis, as colleges struggled to adapt to the requirements of a new age. And as Harvard went, so went the rest of American higher education.

Lacking real expertise, first-year-composition instructors were guided largely by "common-sense" notions about the acquisition of literacy. But in the 1960s, a whole new period of social mobility generated an explosion in rhetoric-and-composition theory and practice. Since then we have learned many truths that fly in the face of common-sense ideas. Here are just a few:

- Students who do one kind of writing well will not automatically do other kinds of writing well.
- The conventions of thought and expression in disciplines differ, enough so that what one learns in order to write in one discipline might have to be unlearned to write in another.
- Writing is not the expression of thought; it is thought itself. Papers are not containers for ideas, containers that need only to be well formed for those ideas to emerge clearly. Papers are the working out of ideas. The thought and the container take shape simultaneously (and develop slowly, with revision).
- When students are faced with an unfamiliar writing challenge, their apparent ability to write will falter across a broad range of "skills." For example, a student who handles grammatical usage, mechanics, organization, and tone competently in an explanation of the effects of global warming on coral reefs might look like a much weaker writer when she tries her hand at a chemistry-lab report for the first time.
- Teaching students grammar and mechanics through drills often does not work.
- Patterns of language usage, tangled up in complex issues like personal and group identities, are not easy to change.
- Rhetorical considerations like ethos, purpose, audience, and occasion are crucial to even such seemingly small considerations as word choice and word order.
- Writing involves abilities we develop over our lifetimes. Some students are more advanced in them when they come to college than are others. Those who are less advanced will not develop to a level comparable to the more-prepared students in one year or even in two, although they may reach adequate levels of ability over time.

Those truths, and others like them, have reshaped our understanding of what writing is and how it is learned. But administrators, faculty members in other disciplines, and even some

academics trained in traditional English studies still cling to common-sense notions about literacy education. Those notions see composition as a "basic skill" that students should have attained by the end of their first year in college at the latest — first-year composition is therefore essentially remedial — just as Harvard saw it in 1874. From that perspective, academic literacy is something that students should have when they arrive at college. If they don't, then one or two courses are deemed sufficient to bring them up to speed — never mind that any complex ability that we do not fully possess, like speaking French or playing the piano, will not be mastered so quickly.

A related common-sense myth of literacy acquisition sees first-year composition as a way to prepare students for writing in other disciplines. However, as Sharon Crowley, a rhetoric-and-composition instructor at Arizona State University and author of *Toward a Civil Discourse* (University of Pittsburgh, 2006), and David Russell, a professor of rhetoric and professional communication at Iowa State University and author of *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), have pointed out, writing experts have learned that disciplinary genres differ.

To take just one small example, most humanities-based writing handbooks tell writers to avoid the passive voice, but chemistry-lab reports advise students to write only in the passive. And it is not just usage issues that vary from discipline to discipline; genres, styles, resources, approaches, and habits of thought all do as well.

Of course, one could argue that all academic writing should have some qualities in common: clear organization, detailed development, mechanical correctness, evidence of critical thinking, and so on. But literacy studies have shown us that problems with such issues tend to emerge or recede as students move from genre to genre, so that Bill might write a narrative paper in first-year composition with no organizational problems and then go on to write a philosophy paper with many. Every composition teacher has seen students whose abilities seem to deteriorate rather than improve as the course proceeds. The new problems are just fault lines exposed by the pressure of an unfamiliar genre of writing.

Moreover, a particularly pernicious common-sense myth of literacy acquisition is that because writing is a "basic skill," almost anyone can teach first-year composition — newly minted graduate students in English literature, journalists, high-school English-literature teachers, even M.A.'s in other disciplines — and that those faculty members don't need to be paid well, because what they teach is so basic. But the viewpoint shaped by 50 years of

research, analysis, and experimentation views composition differently. Indeed, writing experts see in composition a body of knowledge as rich as any other discipline's. Thus first-year composition should be an introduction to the discipline of rhetoric and composition (just as Psychology 101 is an introduction), generating knowledge that students can learn and on which they can be tested and evaluated through their writing.

From that vantage point, first-year composition is only indirectly preparatory to writing in other disciplines: What a student will learn is somewhat applicable to writing a history or psychology paper, but significant gaps in preparation will remain. Psychology professors who want students to write effective papers, even at the introductory level, can't count on first-year composition to have done all the preparatory work.

Academics who would like their students to become effective writers must work with professors of rhetoric and composition not only to design effective writing assignments and writing instruction within their own courses, but also to create discipline-specific versions of advanced composition courses and require, or at least urge, their majors to take those courses. Such courses should be paid for collaboratively, with the discipline requiring or recommending the course contributing its fair share.

Finally, expertise in writing theory argues that those who teach first-year composition should be as credentialed as those who teach Introduction to Sociology, World History, or Environmental Biology, and should be paid comparably. The most destructive common-sense myth about literacy acquisition is that since it is "a basic skill," it ought to come quickly and cheaply. It isn't, and it shouldn't. Blinded by a common-sense myth, colleges have perpetuated what Ms. Crowley aptly calls an "underclass" of writing instructors who are underpaid, overworked, and often unprepared to teach the subject that students must learn: rhetoric and composition.

So let's dispel the myths, and with them, first-year composition itself. Farewell, basic skills. Hello, Introduction to Rhetoric and Comp.

Mark Richardson is an assistant professor of writing and linguistics at Georgia Southern University.

The New York Times

Making College ‘Relevant’

By KATE ZERNIKE

Published: December 29, 2009

THOMAS COLLEGE, a liberal arts school in Maine, advertises itself as Home of the Guaranteed Job! Students who can't find work in their fields within six months of graduation can come back to take classes free, or have the college pay their student loans for a year.

The University of Louisiana, Lafayette, is eliminating its philosophy major, while Michigan State University is doing away with American studies and classics, after years of declining enrollments in those majors.

And in a class called “The English Major in the Workplace,” at the University of Texas, Austin, students read “Death of a Salesman” but also learn to network, write a résumé and come off well in an interview.

Even before they arrive on campus, students — and their parents — are increasingly focused on what comes after college. What's the return on investment, especially as the cost of that investment keeps rising? How will that major translate into a job?

The pressure on institutions to answer those questions is prompting changes from the admissions office to the career center. But even as they rush to prove their relevance, colleges and universities worry that students are specializing too early, that they are so focused on picking the perfect major that they don't allow time for self-discovery, much less late blooming.

“The phrase drives me crazy — ‘What are you going to do with your degree?’ — but I see increasing concerns about that,” says Katharine Brooks, director of the liberal arts career center at the University of Texas, Austin, and author of “You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path From Chaos to Career.” “Particularly as money gets tighter, people are going to demand more accountability from majors and departments.”

Consider the change captured in the annual survey by the University of California, Los Angeles, of more than 400,000 incoming freshmen. In 1971, 37 percent responded that it was essential or very important to be “very well-off financially,” while 73 percent said

the same about “developing a meaningful philosophy of life.” In 2009, the values were nearly reversed: 78 percent identified wealth as a goal, while 48 percent were after a meaningful philosophy.

The shift in attitudes is reflected in a shifting curriculum. Nationally, business has been the most popular major for the last 15 years. Campuses also report a boom in public health fields, and many institutions are building up environmental science and just about anything prefixed with “bio.” Reflecting the new economic and global realities, they are adding or expanding majors in Chinese and Arabic. The University of Michigan has seen a 38 percent increase in students enrolling in Asian language courses since 2002, while French has dropped by 5 percent.

Of course, universities have always adjusted curriculum to reflect the changing world; Kim Wilcox, the provost and vice president for academic affairs at Michigan State, notes that universities, his included, used to offer majors in elocution and animal husbandry. In a major re-examination of its curriculum, Michigan State has added a dozen or so new programs, including degrees in global studies and, in response to a growing industry in the state, film studies. At the same time, it is abandoning underperformers like classical studies: in the last four years, only 13 students have declared it their major.

Dropping a classics or philosophy major might have been unthinkable a generation ago, when knowledge of the great thinkers was a cornerstone of a solid education. But with budgets tight, such programs have come to seem like a luxury— or maybe an expensive antique — in some quarters.

When Louisiana’s regents voted to eliminate the philosophy major last spring, they agreed with faculty members that the subject is “a traditional core program of a broad-based liberal arts and science institution.” But they noted that, on average, 3.4 students had graduated as philosophy majors in the previous five years; in 2008, there were none. “One cannot help but recognize that philosophy as an essential undergraduate program has lost some credence among students,” the board concluded.

In one recent survey, two-thirds of public institutions said they were responding to budget cuts with extensive reviews of their programs. But Dr. Wilcox says curriculum changes at Michigan State have just as much to do with what students, and the economy, are demanding. “We could have simply reduced the campus operating budget

by X percent,” he says, “but we wouldn’t have positioned ourselves any differently for the future.”

Education Life

In Michigan, where the recession hit early and hard, universities are particularly focused on being relevant to the job market. “There’s been this drumbeat that Michigan has got to diversify its economy,” says Mary Sue Coleman, the president of the University of Michigan.

Dr. Coleman says she had an “aha” moment five years ago, when the director of admissions was describing the incoming class and noted that 10 percent — some 600 students — had started a business in high school. The university has responded with about 100 entrepreneurship courses across the curriculum, including “Financing Research Commercialization” and “Engineering Social Venture Creation,” for students interested in creating businesses that not only do well financially but also do society good. Next year, the university will begin offering a master’s to students who commit to starting a high-tech company.

At the same time, Dr. Coleman is wary of training students for just one thing — “creating them to do some little widget,” as she says. Michigan has begun a speaker series featuring alumni or other successful entrepreneurs who come in to talk about how their careers benefited from what Dr. Coleman calls “core knowledge.”

“We believe that we do our best for students when we give them tools to be analytical, to be able to gather information and to determine the validity of that information themselves, particularly in this world where people don’t filter for you anymore,” Dr. Coleman says. “We want to teach them how to make an argument, how to defend an argument, to make a choice.” These are the skills that liberal arts colleges in particular have prided themselves on teaching. But these colleges also say they have the hardest time explaining the link between what they teach and the kind of job and salary a student can expect on the other end.

“There’s no immediate impact, that’s the problem,” says John J. Neuhauser, the president of St. Michael’s College, a liberal arts school in Vermont. “The humanities tend to educate people much farther out. They’re looking for an impact that lasts over decades, not just when you’re 22.”

When prospective students and their parents visit, he says, they ask about placement rates, internships and alumni involvement in job placement. These are questions, he says, that he never heard 10 years ago.

St. Michael's, like other colleges, has adapted its curriculum to reflect demand. The college had to create new sections of chemistry labs and calculus on the spot during summer registration, and it raised the cap on the number of students in a biology lab. "I'd say, given the vagaries of the business cycle, people are looking for things that they know will always be needed — accountants, scientists, mathematicians," says Jeffrey A. Trumbower, dean of the college. "Those also happen to be some of the most challenging majors academically, so we'll see how these trends hold up."

Still, Dr. Neuhauser finds the careerism troubling. "I think people change a great deal between 18 and 22," he says. "The intimate environment small liberal arts colleges provide is a great place to grow up. But there's no question that smacks of some measure of elitism now."

There's evidence, though, that employers also don't want students specializing too soon. The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently asked employers who hire at least 25 percent of their workforce from two- or four-year colleges what they want institutions to teach. The answers did not suggest a narrow focus. Instead, 89 percent said they wanted more emphasis on "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing," 81 percent asked for better "critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills" and 70 percent were looking for "the ability to innovate and be creative."

"It's not about what you should major in, but that no matter what you major in, you need good writing skills and good speaking skills," says Debra Humphreys, a vice president at the association.

The organization has conducted focus groups with employers before and heard the same thing. With the recession, she says, they weren't sure the findings would hold. "But it's even more intense. Companies are demanding more of employees. They really want them to have a broad set of skills." She adds that getting employer feedback is the association service that "college leaders find the most valuable, because they can answer the question when parents ask, 'Is this going to help in getting a job?'"

Career advisers say that colleges and universities need to do a better job helping students understand the connection between a degree and a job. At some institutions, this means career officers are heading into the classroom.

Last fall at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, the career office began integrating workplace lessons into capstone research seminars for humanities majors. In one of three classes taught by Anne Scholl-Fiedler, the director, she asks students to develop a 30-second commercial on their “personal brand.” “When somebody asks, ‘How are you going to use that English degree?’ you need to be able to clearly articulate what you are able to do,” she says. “If you don’t know, employers probably won’t either.”

At the University of Texas, Ms. Brooks says, many parents drop their children off freshman year asking, “How can my child transfer to the business school?” She tries to establish the value of the liberal arts with a series of courses called “The Major in the Workplace.” Students draw what she calls a “major map,” an inventory of things they have learned to do around their major. Using literature — “The Great Gatsby,” perhaps, or “Death of a Salesman” — she gets students to think about how the themes might apply to a workplace, then has them read Harvard Business Review case studies. The goal, she says, is to get students to think about how an English major (or a psychology or history major) might view the world differently, and why an employer might value that.

“There’s this linear notion that what you major in equals your career,” Ms. Brooks says. “I’m sure it works for some majors. If you want to be an electrical engineer, that major looks pretty darn good.

“The truth is,” she says, “students think too much about majors. But the major isn’t nearly as important as the toolbox of skills you come out with and the experiences you have.”