

that she could carry into the times in which her life would unfold. For what good are roots if you cannot take them with you. Second, she continually reworked herself in light of this stoic aspiration. Third and finally, on the basis of this self-mastery, she rose to a position of influence in society where she was able to help us rework our cultural inheritance, transforming the terms “woman and independent” from antonyms to synonyms.

RBG’s formative trajectory further illustrates that the inward, personal work of integration is anything but private. Each constellation of character—each individual’s quest for rooted responsiveness to the diverse dimensions of self and world—bears witness to the perils and possibilities of personhood. Dynamic wholeness can collapse into monomania or compartmentalization. And yet the very effort to forge and sustain a differentiated integrity, to face up to inconvenient truths, to imaginatively rework one’s inherited formative resources can inspire the efforts of others. Soul action resounds.

SCATTERING REQUIREMENTS

Freedom is the catch-word of this new departure. It is a precious and an attractive word. But, O Liberty! what crimes and cruelties have been perpetuated in thy name!

—James McCosh¹⁰⁰

Given the complexity and importance of the task—educating a whole person—you would think we might have more patience for the idea of general education. Instead, our engagement is perfunctory, rushed, abbreviated. “Gen Ed”: the phrase rolls right off the tongue and onto one’s things-to-do-list. Do laundry: check. Take out trash: check. Satisfy Gen Ed requirements: check. When students at a large public university were recently asked how they choose Gen Ed classes, the most common response was “what best fits my schedule.”¹⁰¹ In another survey, only 7% of students at a state flagship disagreed with the idea that it would be better to replace Gen Ed coursework with more courses in the major.¹⁰² Frustrating though it is, such student indifference only mirrors our own failure to invite students to think about college as something more than queuing for a credential and “paying for the party.”¹⁰³

Consider how the invitation to higher learning has evolved at one of the great land-grant universities, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

(UIUC).¹⁰⁴ Like the other institutions occasioned by the first Morrill Act of 1862, the Illinois Industrial University, as it was first called, began with nothing but a land scrip to be sold to endow the founding of

at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.¹⁰⁵

In March 1867, the forty newly appointed trustees gathered in Springfield for an initial meeting devoted to electing officers and forming committees, including one charged with finding enough furniture to enable a second meeting to be held in Urbana.¹⁰⁶ At that second meeting, the Committee on Courses of Study and Faculty were ready to present a statement of aims and an initial plan of organization. The new university was to stand for the proposition that the “agricultural and mechanical arts” were themselves learned professions requiring systematic study and comprehension, “the peers of any others in their dignity, importance, and scientific scope.” It would offer not superficial training but a “Pierian fount of learning” whose “unfailing flow” would enable “those whose thirst and whose capacities are large to drink their fill.”

The committee sought not only depth but breadth, offering several arguments against “one-sided education.” First, each trade itself demands a broad approach. If farmers and mechanics are also to be “investigators and inventors,” they need something more than “simple knowledge of [their] art.” They need scientific understanding and “the literary culture which will enable them to communicate . . . by public speech their knowledge and discoveries.” Second, a broad education supports “movement and versatility,” as graduates may go on to pursue “successive mastery of several vocations.” Third, the university must prepare for “citizenship as well as for science and industry.” When the time comes to leave “the harvest field for the forum,” the “educated agriculturalist and mechanic” must be “broad-breasted, wise-hearted, clear-thinking.” Rejecting the false choice between liberal and vocational education, the committee closed on this resounding note: “Let us educate for life, as well as for art, leaving genius free to follow its natural attractions, and lending to talent a culture fitting it for all of the emergencies of public or private duty.”

Fast forward a century and a half, and we find a massive, comprehensive research university that more than fulfilled the first part of its mandate. UIUC helped lead the way as the mechanical arts proliferated and deepened into the modern STEM fields. However, something happened to this second idea of educating for life. The resounding call to educate the whole person decayed into the hum of bureaucratic machinery. When I taught at UIUC, here is how we invited students to cultivate themselves for private and public virtue: “The General Education (GenEd) requirements describe the core courses all students must take in order to graduate.”¹⁰⁷ It is true that students who happened to read further would find some perfunctory language about exposure to disciplines and acquisition of thinking and communication skills—but talk about burying the lede! Incoming college students are already well-versed in *studenting*. They are well aware that requirements must be met, grades earned, credits accumulated. Here is a chance to announce that something else could and should be happening in one’s undergraduate years, something of which all of this institutional machinery is but an indicator.

How about this for an alternative, *Onion*-style headline:

Archaeologists Discover Lost Concept of “Higher Education”

Evidence from the recent fossil record suggests that “higher education” may have once meant something other than an elaborate job screening process. While the work of excavation and interpretation is still under way, preliminary findings suggest that the phrase referred not to advanced schooling but to something that went beyond socialization, instruction, and training. Whatever this “higher education” was, it seems it could not be absorbed passively, as students themselves were apparently asked, according to a tentative translation of one inscription found at the site, “to take stock of what you have become and take a lead in your ongoing formation.”

While I have presented this in a fanciful way, the idea is an earnest one. It is true that if universities are to remain solvent, the bursar must be paid. However, it is also true that if they are to remain *universities*, they must do more than admit and administrate students. They must hail those who arrive on campus as learners, summoning them to the formative tasks of higher education.

It is alarming how often this entirely fails to happen. I know because I teach undergraduate courses about educational aims. At first, students hold

the material at arm's length. They believe that they are studying some distant object called "education." And part of this estrangement is by design. We teach texts that challenge the presentism, instrumentalism, and scholasticism that constrain the contemporary educational imagination, from Plato's famous allegory of socialization to Tara Westover's harrowing tale of emancipation.¹⁰⁸ However, each trip to a there and then returns to the here and now. We remind students that what we are discussing bears on what is happening right now, in this room. We prod them to connect the texts to their own educational trajectories and decisions. We ask them, in so many words, how they are shaping their college years in order to shape themselves. This seems to make an impact on a good number of students, and every semester one or two students—including juniors and seniors—make a point of coming to office hours to tell me, with a mix of excitement and dismay, that this is the first time anyone has talked with them about why we are here. They had been oriented to campus and advised about requirements, but no one had ever engaged them about the point of college.¹⁰⁹

I don't mean to elevate telling over showing. These students surely had teachers who, without talking explicitly about the aims of education, provided compelling demonstrations of what is worth learning, doing, and becoming. Nonetheless, what I hear from undergraduates is that they look back on their schooling as a largely passive and bewildering experience, something done to them for reasons that were never truly or fully explained. I am reminded of a piece by the avant-garde doodler, David Shrigley, depicting a person sitting on a stool, milking a cow. The cow looks back over its shoulder and remarks, "What the hell are you doing?"¹¹⁰ There is, after all, only so much milking you can take. I think that many students arrive on campus with a sense, however vague, that college could be and should be different. And they do find more freedom of choice. They get to pick a major, choose classes, and select from a wider variety of extracurricular activities. What they do not usually find are occasions to take stock of their education and shape their formative ideals. The purely negative freedom of the "elective" system begs the crucial question of where students will find the provocation and support, the resources and the reflective space, to cultivate their autonomy and make such election into a genuine act of agency. In my experience, undergraduates are more than eager to find their voices in the great conversation—at once educational and existential, ethical and political—about how to form ourselves and live our

lives. They just need some models—for example, some noninstrumental language for discussing education—and some companions in the search.¹¹¹

UIUC has updated their Gen Ed language, seemingly with the express purpose of remedying the cynical functionalism of the older version. But the new statement protests too much. After listing required areas of study and intended outcomes, it concludes, “General Education at Illinois is more than a set of required courses; it is a gateway into the Illinois experience.”¹¹² I realize that verbal gimmicks are the stock-in-trade of websites everywhere, but this rhetorical sleight of hand is worth a closer look.¹¹³ Of course we want Gen Ed to be something more than a “set of required courses,” but wishing doesn’t make it so. The hollowness and incoherence of Gen Ed is rooted in basic structural features of the modern multiversity.¹¹⁴ Before we take a closer look at how the UIUC website pulls off this magic(al thinking) trick, let us examine one university structure that seems perfectly designed to derail any attempt to restore Gen Ed to substance.

The majority of leading universities now employ some version of RCM budgeting.¹¹⁵ According to one early adopter (1990), Indiana University Bloomington, RCM is about “moving power” from central administration to academic units (this could be a school, department, or even a program) by giving them “ownership of their individual revenues and costs,” which “allows them to be accountable for their own academic and financial planning and therefore encourages entrepreneurship, efficiency, and educationally sound choices.”¹¹⁶ Apparently, the authors had the “The Principles of Newspeak” close at hand: you are generously *allowed* to self-fund your activities (according to your shifting enrollments and success in the grant game) while becoming a proud *owner* of costs newly devolved to the unit level. In this way, each unit becomes a *responsibility center*, more commonly known as a franchise fighting for market share. IU Bloomington again: “Once the [individual units] have received their income, each pays a tax or assessment fee that goes back to a central unit at the university.” It is doubtful that the entrepreneurialization of the academy has led to more “educationally sound choices.” It is not even clear whether the new decentralized budgeting leads to greater efficiency. What is clear is that RCM threatens to make irreversible the trajectory of the modern university toward dis-integration.

This fragmentation was already well under way by 1963, when Clark Kerr, president of the University of California, Berkeley, coined the term

“multiversity.”¹¹⁷ As Kerr points out, disunity was already a central theme in Abraham Flexner’s famous survey, *Universities: American, English, German* (1930). Flexner argued that a university ought to be “characterized by a highness and definiteness of aim, unity of spirit and purpose.”¹¹⁸ What he found instead was something better described as a “federation,” or even simply as “a line drawn about an enormous number of different institutions of heterogenous quality and purpose.”¹¹⁹ Kerr was not even the first university president to acknowledge the disunity he governed. He recalls how Robert Maynard Hutchins, who served as University of Chicago’s president from 1930 to 1945, liked to quip that “the modern university [is] a series of separate schools and departments held together by a central heating system.”¹²⁰ When Kerr tries to capture midcentury Berkeley in a snapshot, he does not focus nostalgically on some once-central quad or a statue of alma mater, but zooms way out to reveal a sprawling, Rube Goldberg-esque, academic-industrial machine, noting that midcentury Berkeley serves 100,000 students and another 200,000 through extension courses; lists over 10,000 courses in its catalogues; employs more people than IBM; operates in over a hundred locations in more than fifty countries; has “contact with nearly every industry [and] . . . level of government”; “is the world’s largest purveyor of white mice”; and that “over 4000 babies were born in its hospitals.”¹²¹ Going Hutchins one better, Kerr remarks of Berkeley that, “in an area where heating is less important and the automobile more, I have sometimes thought of it as a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking.”¹²² The multiversity, then, is a sprawling organism, with pseudopodia reaching into corporate R&D, government, health care, and other sectors. Campuses simultaneously serve as our culture’s setting for our signature coming-of-age ritual, as epicenters of athletic entertainment, and as headhunters for multiple industries. Even within the category of education, broadly understood, there are competing mandates: instruction, socialization, sorting, credentialing. How could this hydra still have an eye on the core educational task of forming well-rounded and integrated persons? Amid this swirl of competing mandates, in the face of disciplinary divides entrenched in a rigid departmental structure, can faculty still work together to articulate an integral vision of undergraduate education?

The authors of the *Harvard Redbook* (1945) still managed to pull it off, though only with massive institutional support. Tellingly, the next major

statement on general education, Daniel Bell's *The Reforming of General Education* (1966), was entrusted by design to "a committee of one."¹²³ With the rise of RCM in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is no longer just a matter of incommensurable values and traditions in the curricular conversation. Units now come to the table driven by naked self-interest. And who can blame them, when capturing Gen Ed traffic has become a matter of survival? The curricular conversation has been replaced by an interdepartmental trade treaty: you recruit your students, and I'll recruit mine; I'll send students your way to fulfill a breadth requirement if you do the same for me. In this way, RCM serves as a powerful centripetal force, pulling our attention away from the roots of undergraduate education toward the ever-expanding branches of the tree of knowledge. At UIUC, for example, there are over three hundred majors and specializations. Here are a just a few from early in the alphabet: agri-accounting, behavioral neuroscience, companion animal and equine science, dance, French commercial studies, geophysics, health and aging.¹²⁴ The entrepreneurial university not only pits one side of the quad against the other but even sets up further battles between sub-specialties.¹²⁵ Dance has to fight for room to move within fine and applied arts; a turf war breaks out in the ag school between agri-accounting and crop sciences; the growth of behavioral neuroscience threatens the growth of developmental psychology. Since these battles are often decided on the basis of enrollment, Gen Ed certification can make all the difference. And so RCM "efficiently" drives an endless proliferation of "core" courses, reducing general education to a vague directive to visit each corner of campus at least once. Such hollowing of educational substance is not new. "Education," Michael Oakeshott observes, "has had often to be rescued from the formalism into which it has degenerated."¹²⁶ The problem with RCM is that it creates a deep structural disincentive even to form a rescue party.

Now let us return to the rhetorical device of the gateway. Given that Gen Ed has become a cynical game of tax incentives and franchise fees, it is impossible to read UIUC's statement that "Gen Ed is more than a set of requirements" as anything other than magical thinking. The key to the trick is drawing our attention momentarily to the magician's assistant—the exciting but empty phrase "the Illinois experience"—so that the illusion can be carried off. And voila: gatekeeping is transformed into a gateway! Let us examine this magical gateway more closely. According to UIUC's not atypical requirements, students are required to take

- One of 3 “Composition 1” sequences (of 4, 6, or 8 credit hours)
- One of 57 “Advanced Composition” courses
- One of 144 “US Minority Cultures” courses
- One of 155 “Non-Western Cultures” courses
- One of 213 “Western/Comparative Cultures” courses
- Two of 493 “Humanities and the Arts” courses
- Two of 92 “Natural Sciences and Technology” courses
- One of 31 “Quantitative Reasoning 1” courses
- One of 77 remaining quantitative reasoning courses
- Two of 198 “Social and Behavioral Sciences” courses.¹²⁷

Promised a point of entry, students instead discover a labyrinth of forking paths. Even this prescribed part of the curriculum preserves a dizzying amount of elective freedom, offering students something on the order of 10^{25} different ways to complete the requirements.¹²⁸ It turns out that there are nearly as many gateways to the “Illinois experience” as there are stars in the universe!¹²⁹ Or perhaps it is better to say that this maze-walking is the Illinois experience. Either way, one half of the phrase tells a lie. Either there is no such thing as *the* Illinois experience, since there are as many different experiences as there are routes through the maze; or there is nothing distinctively Illinois about it, since major-plus-distribution-requirements has been the basic formula for US higher education for over a century.¹³⁰

Doublespeak flourishes wherever institutional realities and ideals diverge, as we anxiously reach for signifiers that can cover up these gaps. We speak of “gateways” when the path into the curriculum has become a warren of checkpoints. We reach for phrases such as “the Illinois experience” because undergraduate education is somehow both disturbingly generic and impossibly multifarious. And what we find when we peel back the label “core courses” is a vast decentered universe of curricular possibilities in which the distinction between core and periphery is meaningless. Neither an orienting center nor well-marked path, Gen Ed classes are more like wormholes mysteriously transporting students from one corner of campus to another.

To this, one might respond that students define their own curricular centers through their choice of majors and that distribution requirements ensure that students explore their personal peripheries. The engineering major is forced to take some humanities and social science courses; the art major has to take some natural and social science; the psych major must try

out the humanities and natural sciences. Isn't this a simple, flexible way to ensure well-roundedness and breadth of understanding? As I have already begun to suggest, I think the most honest answer is that we really have no idea what happens inside the black box of our distributed elective system. The only generalization we can make is that no student will graduate without some exposure to some different traditions and disciplines. In fact, even if we were looking at a particular transcript, I think we would be hard-pressed to say whether a student had become well-rounded.

Consider this hypothetical Gen Ed pathway at UIUC. Let's imagine a computer engineering (CE) major who completes one of the Comp 1 sequences and satisfies the science/technology and quantitative reasoning requirements through CE courses. That leaves eight requirements that, thanks to three "double dippers," can be met through five classes as follows:

1. Viking Sagas in Translation (Humanities/Arts; Western/Comparative Cultures)
2. Slavery and Identity (Humanities and the Arts; US Minority Cultures)
3. The Politics of the National Parks (Social/Behavioral Sciences)
4. Life in the Andes (Social/Behavioral Sciences; Non-Western Cultures)
5. Ethical Dilemmas of Business (Advanced Composition)¹³¹

Would these five classes help one explore what one is made of and cultivate the important parts of oneself? Will they provoke and support the work of personal integration? Will they broaden the student's outlook on the world? Will they reveal blind spots in CE and help the student appreciate rival ways of knowing? It's certainly possible, but it is hard to say without much more information. Will the student gain insight into Western culture during this semester with the Vikings? Will studying life in the Andes expose the contingency of the student's own culture? After final exams, will this student continue to think about the legacy of slavery, the politics of conservation, and the ethics of business? Will this student at all learn to think like a poet, historian, anthropologist, or philosopher? Transcripts are of no help in answering such questions.

Neither is a review of syllabi particularly helpful. Every couple of decades, a campus may conduct a searching discussion about what it means to be generally educated. In the meantime, Gen Ed committees just screen out clearly inappropriate courses and give the rest a pass. Mutually assured validation maintains détente in the RCM-budgeting cold war. Besides, the

syllabus reflects only the *official* curriculum. What we need to understand is how the official curriculum is interpreted, embodied, and *enacted*. As an undergraduate, I took a course on Buddhism that satisfied a distribution requirement. Clearly the committee that approved this course had no idea how stultifying it would be. Buddhism appeared not as a contestable creed, living practice, or even as a dynamic movement of ideas across centuries and cultures, but as a series of inert facts: the number of characters in the Prajnaparamita Sutra (260), the date of the first Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra (286 CE), and so on. Several years later, Richard Rorty gave me language for describing what I had experienced. In order for college courses to serve as “provocations to self-creation,” we must find professors who are “not exclusively concerned with preparing people to be graduate students in their various specialities . . . and reproducing current disciplinary matrices.”¹³² I survived the Buddhism class unscathed. Indeed, as far as I can tell, no part of me was affected at all, aside from temporary information storage.

If the official curriculum is differentially enacted by teachers, the enacted curriculum itself is differentially *received* by students. If we really want to know whether a course is broadening, simply diverting, or even narrowing, we need to understand how students approach and make sense of the experience. The students in Introduction to Climate Science, for example, include freshmen and seniors and hail from a variety of majors including dance, communications, elementary ed, finance, and history. They chose the course because they heard it was the easiest course satisfying the natural science requirement; they are gravely concerned about global warming; it fit their schedule; it is a prerequisite for applying to the environmental studies major; they couldn’t get into courses they wanted; their friend wanted to take it together; they have an uncle who is a climate change denier. Only when we consider these diverse trajectories can we start to answer key questions, such as, Are most students checked out from the start because they were just checking off a box? How many are finding a way to view the course material as possible answers to genuine questions? Do challenges to their worldviews even register, or are they filtered away by confirmation bias? Does the class offer the kind of space described by Michael Roth as “safe enough” from reprisal that students are able to “unfreeze” beliefs enough to modify them?¹³³ And what if these unfrozen beliefs are toxic for others? In Roth’s “heterodox” classroom culture, the received

curriculum will differ sharply for majoritarian and subaltern students.¹³⁴ Discussing general education without getting into such details of reception is just spitting in the wind.

Even unpacking the curriculum as enacted and received in particular classes is insufficient. In order to understand whether we are truly helping students become educated as whole persons, we need to expand our focus both temporally and spatially. Temporally, we must examine the entire trip from core to periphery and back again. Spatially, we must follow the student into informal educational spaces. With this wide-angle lens, two further dimensions come into view: the *hidden* curriculum (the lessons implied in the ways we position teachers and students and frame the act of learning) and the *null* curriculum (what we teach through our silences and omissions). As we have started to see, the hidden curriculum of Gen Ed is not very well hidden, barely papered over with this phrase “distribution requirements.” Is Gen Ed an effort to distribute our time and energies in light of some ideal of formative justice? Or is this in fact what it sounds like, a logistical arrangement, a distribution of IUs across the ledgers of the multiversity? At first blush, the word “requirement” suggests unfreedom, and certainly students experience it as such. On closer inspection, Gen Ed is about not curtailing but channeling freedom. Steering your curricular shopping cart around the multiversity, selecting at least one item from each aisle, it becomes clear that what you are buying is the very idea of freedom as consumer choice.

Now let us look more closely at the beginning and end of the student’s Gen Ed round trip. How do we frame the departure, and how do we receive the student upon their return? Here is where we find a series of instructive omissions. We do not tell students that they have come to a place devoted to preserving and animating the kinds of resources—practices, ideas, texts, works—that have proven useful in our efforts to understand and form ourselves. We do not point out that these crisscrossing paths worn into the quad are a physical representation of a centuries-old attempt to keep alive a thoughtful, dynamic conversation about how to live a life worth living. It would be nice if students encountered some productive framing of the project of general education as part of their recruitment, admission, and orientation. It would be even better if such ideas found reinforcement in their major courses. Does the art professor ever tell the art majors that it might be a good idea to make a serious study of economics or psychology?

Does the engineering professor testify to the importance of poetry or philosophy? Does the history professor recommend that history majors take an interest in biology or business? Every professor thinks that their own Gen Ed class is of supreme value. But how often do we signal the importance of the process as a whole? If Gen Ed is really just an interdepartmental trade pact among competing firms, why should we be surprised when students treat the process as an enigma, an annoyance, an educational excise tax?

Whereas we launch students in a problematic way, we pay virtually no attention to their return trip. And yet this is the most important phase of transformative education, which we can sequence as follows:

1. A student launches from Frame X to encounter unfamiliar Frame Y.
2. At first, the student has an almost entirely X-framed view of Y. Over time, it emerges that Y is not one more object to be framed by X, but a rival frame.
3. Eventually, the student might acquire not only a Y-framed view of Y but also a Y-framed view of X.

It is not clear how many Gen Ed experiences ever develop beyond phase 1. Even if someone does, in the course of a single semester, begin to get the hang of an alternate way of asking and answering, viewing and valuing, most campuses have no structures in place to support students to undertake the challenging work of phase 3, integrating their defamiliarizing experience into an expanded vision of their work, values, and world. Without a concerted effort, the novel ideas students encounter in their peripheries are likely to remain just that, peripheral. Trips to the national parks or the Andes become just holidays.

If we were serious about general education, courses in the major would support this integrity work by making room for interdisciplinary conversation and personal reflection. However, even a philosophy course on epistemology or ethics is unlikely to welcome the kind of messy, ad hoc questions about knowledge and value that students are really asking themselves:

Why do the business students and the art students sneer at each other? What does it mean that my engineering professor and lit professor cannot understand each other at all? Why does my religion class seem so totally unrelated to my campus faith group? Does my education professor really think that I was brainwashed by my schooling? Why do we never talk about politics in one class and only about politics in another? Why were all of the students in my seminar

acting like the point of college was to get into graduate school? Would my environmental studies professor look down on my parents? Why don't any of the things I like to read show up on syllabi?

To process such active fissures in experience requires a kind of inefficient conversation, full of leaps and loops, awkwardly combining the goofy and the grave, the half-baked and the overwrought, the granular and the grandiose. It is the rare class indeed that can make room for this sort of clumsy, intimate conversation. And this may be just as well. The formal curriculum already has enough to accomplish, and such integrity work may find a more natural home in informal education, in late-night discussions and long rides to away games.

The problem is that, while classrooms are typically too task-oriented and impersonal, social spaces are often infected with more or less virulent strains of anti-intellectualism. What is needed is a kind of third space, one free from both scholasticism and anti-intellectualism. Finding such conversational spaces can make all the difference in general education, between merely stuffing some information into your mental backpack and truly integrating insights into your character and outlook. And these spaces do emerge in dorm-room dialogues, dining hall debates, and walks across the quad—that is, except when they don't. Integrity work does not require (or perhaps even favor) a formal setting, but it does require certain supporting conditions such as interpersonal trust, a spirit of serious play, and an ethos of intellectual friendship. It is easy to espouse a “living-learning” ideal and much harder to enact it. It is not enough to build dorms, staff dining halls, and fertilize the grass on the quad. One must seed and carefully cultivate a culture of conversation.

By expanding our definition of curriculum, we have widened the search for a genuine response to our human need for roots and branches. However, as we have canvassed the sprawling, entrepreneurial multiversity—with its specialized, technical knowledge, its negative conception of freedom, its culture of distraction and disconnection—we have found only curricular evasions of the twofold task of formation. Let us conclude this section with a review of the argument for this claim.

Despite its ostensible commitment to well-roundedness, the multiversity has marginalized and distorted this ideal. Consigned to a compulsory corner of the curriculum, well-roundedness appears not as a desirable aim in its

own right but as a sort of tollbooth on the highway of specialized career preparation. The ideal is further distorted through a series of reductions. Gen Ed targets not the whole person, but the whole intellect, and further reduces this idea of intellectual breadth to that of academic interdisciplinarity. We then hollow out even this reduced version of well-roundedness by assigning it the poor proxy of mechanical distribution requirements. Meanwhile, for this slight imposition on the student's freedom of choice, we overcompensate with endless options, proliferated through our interdepartmental trade wars. And so, having reduced well-roundedness to a weak check on academic overspecialization, we retreat to the level of the transcript. Far from a robust curricular engagement with the task of educating the whole person, what we now call general education amounts to a formalization of a reduction of a distortion, sealed inside a bureaucratic black box.

If Gen Ed is poorly designed to ensure well-roundedness, it seems pretty well designed to frustrate integration. Indeed, some early observers candidly described the new rules of curricular distribution as “scattering requirements.”¹³⁵ One would think that life is already scattered enough. In our culture of distraction and overwork, we jump from this to that, checking off the items on our things-to-do list. And, like all of us, undergraduates cope with the fragmentation of experience through the quick fix of compartmentalization. They put academic work in one compartment and “the real world” in another. They divide the personal and the intellectual, classrooms and dorm rooms, campus culture and hometown values, current and former selves. The university should be working to heal these deeper rifts, helping students connect their studies with their past experiences, future paths, and nonscholastic presents. But we don't even provide space and support to work through the disconnects in the formal curriculum. It is not only Gen Ed classes that feel scattered. Students often struggle to understand how the courses in their majors fit together. Indeed, they sometimes struggle to see how the different weeks of a single course, or even the different points in a single lecture, cohere. If nowhere else, Gen Ed should be the place where students find an alternative to the grind, an antidote to fragmentation, a space to collect themselves and check their bearings. Instead, we propel students to various corners of campus through curricular wormholes of forced election. Such a system is not well designed to support students to form even rough maps of the universe of knowledge,

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/15228.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/15228.001.0001)

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Citation:

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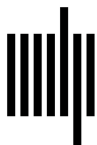
DOI: [10.7551/mitpress/15228.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/15228.001.0001)

ISBN (electronic): 9780262377607

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2024

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding and support from MIT Press Direct to Open



The MIT Press

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The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

This book was set in Bembo Book MT Pro by Westchester Publishing Services.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Higgins, Chris, 1967– author.

Title: Undeclared : a philosophy of formative higher education / Chris Higgins.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023028597 (print) | LCCN 2023028598 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780262547499 (paperback) | ISBN 9780262377614 (epub) |

ISBN 9780262377607 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Education, Higher—Aims and objectives.

Classification: LCC LB2322.2 .H487 2024 (print) | LCC LB2322.2 (ebook) |

DDC 378/.01—dc23/eng/20230814

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